

CYC-Online

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

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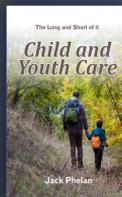
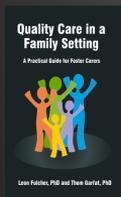
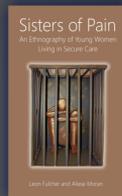
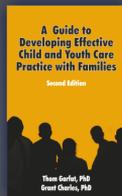
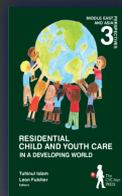
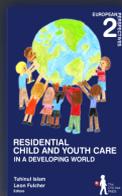
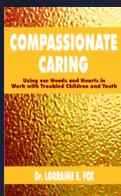
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2020 Vision for 2021

Leon Fulcher

Kia Ora Koutou Katoa, Warm Greetings and Happy New Year to all who are living with or around children and young people - whether in foster care, group care or in receipt of special education in our world! We recognise and celebrate you as essential workers during these times of Covid-19 Pandemic - wherever you live and work! 2020 has etched memories into our conscious and sub-conscious thinking, remaining a significant influence for the rest of our lives. Keeping children and young people safe and connected to family members wherever possible has been a priority in 2020, while seeking to keep essential workers safe. Masks, protective clothing, hand-washing protocols, and sanitizers have shaped opportunity moments in our care relationships.



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The weeks and months ahead will no doubt continue to present us with pandemic uncertainties. The first injections of Covid-19 vaccine have begun with elderly people and essential health care workers, and vaccinations are likely to continue throughout 2021 and beyond. There are of course those who believe – despite scientific evidence – that vaccinations do bad things to our bodies. Virus deniers are expected to become even more vocal in 2021, even as record numbers of deaths peak from this virus every day. That spiralling pattern will likely continue! Most have learned to think of ‘waves’ and ‘peaks’ with this virus. That is why it is important in child and youth care practice that we stay connected and actively involved in a personal relationship with each young person in our care. Just because some people are ‘tired of this Covid-19 thing’, it does not mean it is safe to ignore social distancing or the recommended handwashing and the wearing of face masks as we go about our daily routines.

Historic reviews of the physical and sexual abuse of children and young people in care are other headlines that will demand the attention of all child and youth care workers in 2021 - wherever they live and work! Such reviews have already been carried out in Canada, Australia, and other English-speaking countries, including Africa. New Zealand is presently examining this sad feature of care histories, whether in State or church-based care or in residential boarding schools. As an aspiring profession, child and youth care needs to articulate agreed care standards and demonstrate a capacity to monitor and report regularly on developmental outcomes that children and young people achieve while in statutory or voluntary care. Professional recognition requires that we ‘up our game’ with young people and their involvement with family members who remain important influences in shaping their future lives.



Active participation in decision-making about the care and education of children and young people is another theme that will require greater attention in the year ahead. Family participation in decision-making about the care and education of their children yields huge dividends, once professionals get over viewing themselves as experts. The challenge is to demonstrate expertise through daily practises! Establishing connections with children or young people, along with important family members, helps to build relationships that matter both for today and in the future. It involves using 'expert knowledge' to inform relational practices that help to achieve developmental outcomes that matter to everyone.

Zoom, Skype, Facetime, WhatsApp and other video-teleconferencing applications are expected to take on growing importance in 2021 to promote virtual connections and relationships. *The International Child and Youth Care Network* (CYC-Net) has already initiated virtual moments with child and youth care workers in different parts of the world! Greater use of virtual encounters with young people and family members will become more common in 2021, just as we have seen tele-health appointments now being used routinely during Covid-19 lockdown conditions. So long as we remain solution-focused in the weeks ahead, my hope is that greater recognition will be given to the essential worker roles that child and youth care practitioners perform.

My wish for 2021 is that every child and youth care worker might have access to personal and professional supervision that assists them to develop personal competencies and confidence that help make moments even more meaningful with children, young people and family members. I am not referring here to what might be referred to as 'administrative supervision'. As important as organisational management might be with the daily activities of care work teams, administrative supervision is not the



same as personal and professional supervision. The latter focus is concerned with how each worker thinks about, feels about and actively does something about important - yet taxing - essential care tasks as required. When supervision like this was not available, co-workers may be able to negotiate 'peer supervision contracts' that supplement what personal and professional supports are available where they work.

During this continuing pandemic, self-care for essential workers is likely will be even more important in 2021 than ever before. Self-care is not always easy to achieve! At least one hour of personal time devoted to continuing learning and professional development each working week is recommended and might even include regular reading available through *The International Child and Youth Care Network* at CYC-Net! Devoting one hour each week to self-care is not always easy to achieve. The whole idea of self-care may be casually dismissed by those thinking that it has '*nothing to do with my child and youth care work!*' However, it is helpful at such times to remember how Professor Henry Maier - one of the grandfathers of contemporary child and youth care work - argued that Care for the Caregiver(s) is an essential prerequisite for quality outcomes with children.

We wish you a mindful 2021 ahead and may there be opportunity moments in your daily life space for smiling and laughter with others. May we support and practice self-care efforts that keep us all safe, protecting others and doing our part to sustain Covid-19 virus free communities in which we live. *Ka Ki'te! Stand Tall!*

LEON FULCHER is an International Child & Youth Care Consultant at Outcomes that Matter (www.TransformOutcomes.com) and a member of the CYC-Net Board of Governors.



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Love in 2021

Hans Skott-Myhre

Over the years I have had the opportunity to think and write a bit about love in the context of CYC. With Scott Kouri, Kathleen Skott-Myhre, and Jeff Smith, I wrote about love unmoored from conventional social structures in a piece we called [Orphan Love](#). Kathleen and I also wrote on [Revolutionary Love](#), [Love and Community](#), and [Love as Capacity](#). In my column here, I have written on [Love and Anger](#) and [What's Love Got to Do With It?](#) I also taught a graduate course in the Psychology Department on Love and Spinoza called Love and Revolution. All of which is to say that I believe love is key to doing radical youthwork as we enter the third decade of the 21st century. Indeed, without it, everything we do will be diminished and corrupted.

As I write this, we are in the middle of Hanukkah and approaching Christmas and Kwanza. Where I live in the U.S. (southern bible belt) Christmas is very much the dominant atmospheric. For those of us raised in the tradition of a religious Christmas, but currently without a clear religious or spiritual affiliation or set of beliefs, it can be a time of complicated feelings ranging from ambivalence to alienation. It can also be a time rich in complex entanglements of ancient pagan ways of knowing and celebrating, mixed with traditional and contemporary Christian religious practices. Where I live, to have a secular Christmas can be made up of a rich mélange of childhood memories, commercialism, and emotional resonances that are sometimes difficult to articulate. For me,



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one of the notes struck by the Christmas holiday that is often overshadowed by the pomp and circumstance of the holiday is love.

Every year since I was a young man, I have heard [John Lennon](#) sing:

*And so is this is Christmas
And what have you done
Another year over
A new one just begun*

The song that Lennon wrote in the latter years of his short life always reads to me as both an indictment and an imperative. An indictment, in the sense that there has never been a year in my lifetime in which the kind of love implied by the origin story of Christmas has ever really come close to being truly actualized. The background chant with children's voices singing "the war is over," I also hear as an ongoing plea for love. However, the wars are not over, they are proliferating and extending in both obvious and extremely subtle ways.

I am reminded of a song from the same period by the folk-rock singer [Melanie](#) in which she sings,

*Look what they've done to my song ma
look what they've done to my song
it's the only thing I could do half right
and they've turned it out all wrong ma
look what they've done to my song*

For Lennon's legacy, I have to wonder about his call and what we've done with it. And so it is Christmas and what have we done? Of course, as



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CYC workers, we have done quite a lot both individually and as a field. The work is challenging, complex and not without danger physically, psychologically, and emotionally. We work at the cliff face of many of the ongoing disasters that comprise the lived experience of young people in the 21st century. Certainly, we would have to say that the battlefields from which we pick up the wounded, the shell shocked, the terrified, and the infinitely courageous seems to be bottomless and the war never ending.

And what have they done to our song ma? In our work in the midst of a global society gone mad, have we succumbed to the psychotic phantasmagoria that is the realm of the capitalist unconscious. Are we healers, or do we only triage those in our care and saturate them in the lies that they are broken and the world is beyond their control? Do we patch them up just enough and send them back into battle without ever clarifying the terms of the war or whose side we are on? What is our song and what have we done? Is our love corrupted by nationalism, economic exigency, faux morality, and fear, or does it have the force to bring the war to an end and give our song a true voice?



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In the midst of all of this, I asked Alexa to find me some New Orleans Christmas music to lift my spirits. It was not an easy task, as she sometimes finds my request a bit oblique, but after some repeated re-phrasings she found the [Alan Toussaint and Friends compilation A New Orleans Christmas](#). Alan Toussaint passed away a few years back, but was profoundly influential in the New Orleans music world and beyond. For me, anything that has his name associated with it is worth a listen and so I was quite excited to hear what he and his “friends” had put together. The first cut by Larry Hamilton really hit home in terms of how we might talk about love as our desire for the war to be over. He sings:

*The only thing on my Christmas list
Is Love throughout the Year
To dry up all the tears
Take away all fear
That's all I want for Christmas this year*

Hamilton’s call here, is not the same kind of love referenced in many contemporary Christmas songs about missing someone over Christmas, being lonely, or being romantically nostalgic for idyllic past holidays that very probably didn’t exist. It is not romantic love. Instead, it is a love with profound force that Hamilton wants for Christmas.

For those of us in CYC it is quite likely to be a love with which we are familiar. It is love as a force that doesn’t just reside between two people, or within the confines of the mythical nuclear family. It is not even the reformist love of Dicken’s Christmas Carol. Love as Hamilton would have it, crosses time and space in its influence. It isn’t just a love that comes into being over the holidays and then fades over the course of the year, as we



remember that we really don't like each other all that much and that some people are even worthy of our hate and violence. For many of us, that kind of holiday love often doesn't even survive the rigors of family dinners saturated with alcohol and old resentments.

So, when Hamilton makes his Christmas wish, he calls for a love that first addresses pain and trauma; that dries up all the tears. Not some of the tears, but all of them. It the kind of love that is affirmative of life itself as a rich and fecund source of joy that that incorporates the natural processes of loss that is the nature of living, but not the unnecessary brutality of arbitrary loss and trauma.

For those of us in CYC, we desire to dry all the tears of the young people we work with. I know we wish we could love deeply enough that the relationships that are formed in our work would simply erase the pain and suffering we see every day. But, individual love is simply not enough. We need to build a collectivity of love that draws on all our relations, human and more than human. We need an ecology of love that distributes living force across the full range of the world in which we live. We can dry the tears of the children we encounter, but unless we change the way we live on this planet, there will be an infinite amount of new tears welling in the eyes of children and adults all over the world in each minute of every day. As [Elmore James](#) puts it, "The sky is crying, see the tears roll down the street." The sky is crying reflects the enormity of the pain we all feel, that is so large that the only way we can express it is by referencing the force of a thunderstorm.

As we all know, thunderstorms can frightening and the force of nature overwhelming. And, life in these complex and troubled times can be almost much to bear as well. To be in a world in these moments of indeterminacy and uncertainty can be very scary. Hamilton's Christmas



wish is for these fears to be taken away. For most of us, I think we share this desire to take away the fear of the young people we encounter in our work. On many days, we wish we weren't so afraid as well. Of course, the antidote to fear resides in a sense that we can face the world in ways that will reduce the toxicity and increase the affirmation of living things including ourselves. That is very hard to do alone.

Indeed, we can find far more courage as a collective sharing the burden and promise of change, than as a lone hero shouting into the darkness. The sheer force of our capacity together to bring the force of love to bear has far more capacity. As the [The Royal Southern Brotherhood](#) would have it,

*All around the world our love is making history
We sing and pray for joy
Holding our hands up and shouting out loud
This world will become one
It's in our hearts
It's not a choice*

The idea that the world becoming one is not a choice has always struck me as both true and seemingly impossible. But, perhaps the impossible is simply a failure of imagination. It may be that we are so blinded by our tears and running so fast from the world we fear, that we can't see that a new and better world is always emerging right in front of us. If we pay attention, dry our tears, and slow down, we might see through the lies and falsehoods that support hatred and brutality, making it seem normative and necessary. Instead, perhaps we could understand that every act of love is a crack in the wall of suffering. Each crack weakens the structural edifice of our current social system and allows just a little bit of life to emerge, like



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a plant emerging between the rocks or breaking the smooth surface of a paved over forest floor. We are here under it all and our love is making history, if we allow ourselves to notice the force of small moments that assert the force of love.

There is a moment in Australian aboriginal practice that [I wrote about in a column here](#). It is called singing up the country. As [Deborah Bird Rose](#) puts it, “Singing up the country is relational, it communicates to people the fact that people are participating in the web of life” (p. 62). She goes on to say, that such a singing express people’s knowledge, the way they fit in, and their love. It is an assertion of connectivity to life, all living things, and all life’s processes. Perhaps this is the kind of love that is not a choice and can only appear to be missing from our lives through active acts of ideological obfuscation and denial.

There is a similar moment in the recent film [Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom Blues \(based on August Wilson’s play\)](#). In it Ma Rainey says that the blues,

is life’s way of talkin’. You don’t sing to feel better. You sing ‘cause that’s the way of understanding life. Blues helps you get up in the morning, you get up knowing you are not alone. There is something else in the world. Something has been added by that song. The world is an empty place without the blues. I take that emptiness and I try to fill it up with something.

Perhaps all our lived experience across the years is “life’s way of talkin’.” But sometimes we forget that we are singing in a choir of an infinite array of voices (only some of them human). We don’t always sing to feel better. Often we sing to know we are not alone and to add our voice. Let’s



remember that singing is not just vocalizing or carrying a tune. It is the vibrational expression of our body in concert with billions of other bodies all carrying the living hum of life itself. For me, this is the heart of real relational work. To find a way to know that we are life-long members of the living choir and that everything we encounter in our lifetime is an additional harmony. Our job is to find the best blend of voices in each encounter so that our song swells and fill the empty spaces with our reverberating living presence collectively. And so, in answer to Lennon's question,

*And so is this is Christmas
And what have you done
Another year over
A new one just begun*

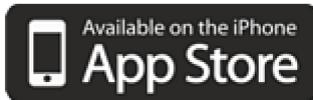
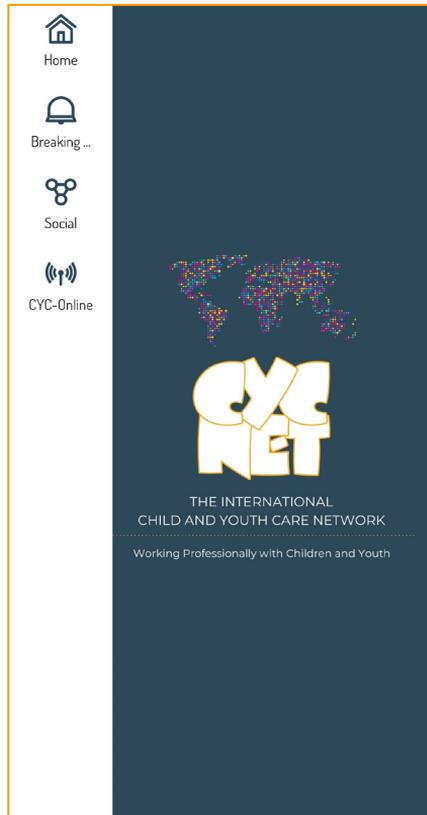
Perhaps we could answer: SING!!

HANS SKOTT-MYHRE is a regular writer for CYC-Online. He is a Professor of Social Work and Human Services at Kennesaw State University in Georgia (USA). He may be reached at hskottmy@kennesaw.edu



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Relationship, Relational and CYC Professional Growth: Relational Practice Explored Further

Jack Phelan

Abstract

This article explores the level of sophistication that CYC practitioners must achieve to become capable of fully embracing a relational approach.

Key terms

other awareness, threshold concepts, socialized and self-authoring thinking, boundaries and praxis.

Relational Practice Goals

CYC practitioners support people who have complex needs based on a reluctance to accept for help and support. This resistance to influence is logical and yet it requires great professional skill to manage. Treatment theories and models are generally easily described in our plans for help, but the process of acquiring the cooperation and participation of the young person or family is problematic.



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Relational approaches are used to build this cooperation and participation, and CYC practitioners work in the life space of others to connect with and support people to agree to be influenced to change.

Relationships, a Basic Beginning

There is a great deal of vague and confusing language used to explain what relational CYC practice is, with too many opinions that don't enable us to get a clear understanding of this complex interaction. Students and practitioners regularly label interactions as relational practice that are merely personal contacts or one-way communications, but because they include relationship features, they are often described as a relational practice approach.

The main dictionary description of relationship is **connection** and this general descriptor enables us to include too many types of interactions into our discussion of relational practice. My focus in this article is to clarify that relationship concepts are not the same thing as relational concepts. The **connection** overlap results in confusion about exactly what relational CYC practice means and why relational practice is a professionally distinct idea, which includes relationships in a very specific way. My thesis is that there are three separate stages of increasingly complex interactions that result in a comprehensive relational connection, which is the goal of the mature CYC practitioner.

The three stages mirror the developing professional competence of practitioners and are necessary developmental experiences that a person must master to become relationally competent.



Relationships or Behavior Control

The initial experience for CYC workers is confusing, because there is a naïve belief that immediate connection and affection will be useful processes when helping youths in care. Most recruits to our field believe that they are skilled in relationship building because they are willing to listen to others and want to be helpful. This natural inclination to value closeness and friendliness often backfires, as closeness is feared and resisted by the youths whom they encounter. Youths and families are suspicious of people who try to get too personally close, and push people away with a variety of strategies that can be challenging for inexperienced workers. Safety is a key dynamic for new staff members, who are struggling with feelings of competence anxiety and boundary struggles. Generally, safety is developed slowly through being less friendly and more impersonal at first, giving the youths or family some space to remain suspicious and skeptical about the helper's intentions. Being fair and consistent are more useful attributes than friendliness and affection until safety is established for both the youth and the worker.

New workers and students are regularly advised by supervisors to be more impersonal, to resist the urge to share personal information with youths in their care. Boundary dynamics are a focus, and thick, impersonal boundaries are more useful for both parties until safety is established. More experienced staff look to their past experiences and smile at their mistakes in trying to build close connections too quickly.

New workers and students need to practice a behavioral approach, focusing on routines and expectations until both they and the youths or family become more comfortable with interacting safely. Attempts to establish closeness or demonstrate caring are threatening to youths, who generally are suspicious of people who try to push through their natural



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defensiveness too quickly. The experience of abuse, neglect and trauma at a young age creates a perfectly logical suspicion of people who appear to be trying to create vulnerability and potential victimization, since they have been hurt before. The new worker also must build competence and confidence is his/her ability to safely manage the demands of the job so that professional nervousness and competence anxiety are under control. The ability to resist the urge to be too friendly early in the helping process is an important issue for new workers and students.

Personal vulnerability and trust are dynamics that are very threatening to people who have experienced abuse and neglect since these lead to exposure to being hurt by others. Therefore, when naive adults try to create connections by being trusting and vulnerable, the people we are trying to support cannot resist the temptation to manipulate this energy and take advantage of these well-meaning efforts. The result of this predictable interaction is an adult who feels resentful and unappreciated combined with a youth/parent who feels vindicated in their initial assessment, which is that the adult does not really like him.



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Post Safety Relationship Dynamics

Once a safe environment exists, the CYC worker can begin to build connection through caring behaviors and being a person that the youth or family values. This is an easily explained stage for most helpers to understand, since the dynamics mirror many of the common-sense relationship issues in life. Basically, most people establish relationship connections by attempting to be attractive to the other person, so that he/she will want to let you get close. Even very new CYC staff realize that when you appear interested in the music, activities and fashion of the youths, they will be more inclined to talk with you and let you get closer. Knowing a skill or having information that young people value will create attractiveness in the adult. Most young adults are Socialized thinkers (Modlin, 2013), which means that they judge the quality of relationships by how much the other person likes them. Therefore, many CYC staff believe that their relationship ability is determined by how well they are liked and remembered by the youths and families that they work with. Even some experienced CYC staff evaluate their effectiveness by noting how many youths and families rely on them or like them personally, since this is the mark of a good relationship for them. Attractive qualities are highly valued by many helpers, since it breaks down the resistance to contact that is a persistent ingredient in helping interactions.

Youth workers become very satisfied when the young people express joy because they are on duty, disappointment when they are gone and respond positively to their requests because they don't want to displease the worker. Family support workers often believe that successful interventions in a family's life are achieved when the parents look forward to each visit because they like the worker. The ability to create this



attraction and connection becomes the goal for many helpers, since being liked is the benchmark of relationship quality.

Role Modelling

Relationship building includes attempts to become a role model for the youth or family member, so that, by creating an attractive persona, the other person will imitate you and incorporate some of your values and habits. Relationship dynamics are focused on the staff member's capability or personal traits with observation and imitation as the learning method to build competence and change in the young person. Parents are often encouraged to observe and imitate the behaviors and attitudes of the family support worker as she/he interacts with the family during visits. Again, this role modelling process mirrors the life experience of younger adults, who are developmentally focused on looking for role models in their own lives who can demonstrate effective adult attitudes, values and behaviours.

Role models can be powerful teaching examples, but there are important limitations to this approach. The helper has become an attractive person, but not necessarily someone whom the youth/family can identify with on a realistic level. In fact, the helper is generally seen as having a much different lifestyle and everyday reality than the youth/family. There are good reasons to imitate the behaviors and values of the worker while they are engaged in the treatment program, since programs reward those types of behaviors, but there is not the same incentive to use these behaviors and attitudes in their everyday lives. Simply put, they do not believe that the helper could survive in their world. In fact, the role modelling effect is to motivate the youth/family to imitate



the helper while they are in the supportive program environment, but it has minimal carry-over value to their real existence.

Building Other Awareness

However, there is value in creating this level of relationship for the people being supported. Relationships that have achieved an attractive connection are valuable because this connection can be a tool for creating the growth of other awareness, which is an essential ingredient for social skill building. Ego-centric thinking is a major impediment to developing the social skills necessary to live with others in a cooperative and problem-free manner. People who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma have very good reasons to stay stuck in a world view that does not encourage thinking about connecting with or even caring about other people. Developmentally they suffer from an inability to grow socially and seem to an observer to be very selfish and uncaring, to the point of being anti-social. I have humorously suggested to my students that all two-year-old children are sociopaths because they are unable to think about anyone else's needs but their own, and this is often the dilemma that the young people and parents whom we serve must contend with. As connections based on the attractiveness of the helper grow stronger, the young person will worry about doing things that will be liked by the helper, which requires him to consider someone else's needs. This is the foundation for building the other awareness which will be a major support in creating the developmental growth needed for future success. It is vitally important to create the need for connection to others that this relationship can build, but there are serious limitations inherent in the focus of these primary relationship interactions. The CYC practitioner has created a relationship that is very personal, based on his/her presence and response. This type of



relationship is characteristic of the interactions of the Competent Care Giver (Phelan, J. 2017), an early development stage of professional practice.

Relationship Focus

The primary focus of the relationship efforts of the Competent Care Giver is personal, based on the behaviors of the practitioner. The Level 1 practitioner creates a connection by increasing his/her liking and caring about the other person, with a belief that the other person will respond similarly. Connections are fueled by the mutual liking, generally built on the beliefs of the practitioner about relationships and the positive responses of the worker.

Competent Care Givers can create powerful connections with young people and families, but these relationships require the practitioner's ongoing presence. When the program ends, or the practitioner moves on, the relationship benefits seem to disappear. In fact, the sadness of loss can build resentment and reluctance to re-engage, sometimes for both sides. The relationship only had value when it involved the practitioner directly. Many Level 1 practitioners attempt to prolong connections because they feel that losing contact will create problems or regression for the young person or family. The value of the relationship is judged by how much the other person is missed.

The developmental journey at this stage of professional practice is to gradually reduce the "me-focus" of the worker, so that eventually he/she becomes able to completely focus on the needs of the person being supported. This is not an easy task and requires at least a full year of practice experience. Many practitioners, especially people with poor or limited supervision, never move beyond this level of thinking about relationships.



Relationship Goals

Level 1 relationship work is built with an emphasis on the practitioner, who unwittingly becomes too important in the connecting process. The initial emphasis of trying to be interested in what the other person enjoys shifts into a focus on one's personal attractiveness to the other. Our goal becomes trying to get the other person to like us, which results in trying to become important to the other person and hoping that our absence will build anticipation of connection. The extent of being valued by the other person becomes the measure of the quality of our relationship. The issue here is that our focus in building relationships with young people and families should be to get them to like and value themselves more, not to like and value us.

Relationship is an important way for humans to connect, and most early career practitioners struggle with these complex constructions about relational work. We all want to be valued by the young people and families in our care, so it is only natural that we focus on being attractive to them. The message we deliver though is that we are particularly wonderful folks who like them in spite of their faults and problems, when what they really need is to feel capable and loveable as they are, while trying to improve some parts of their lives.

Practically speaking, early-stage professionals are performing quite well when they can support young people and families to look outside themselves and want to connect with the worker. But this is not a fully relational connection and as the CYC professional develops more skills, the relational process deepens into something that is much more useful.

The simple explanation for this is that the practitioner has created a relationship based on the young person or family valuing him/her, rather than valuing themselves. Socialized thinkers cannot fully understand this



idea because they define relationship as a mutual liking of the other person, which is the indicator of success. This is a common-sense conception of relationship, shared by many adults, but not complex enough for the purposes of professional CYC practice.

It is very difficult to move beyond this level of understanding relational practice for untrained people. The skills and attitudes of the Competent Care Giver can be achieved by most adults without much professional training. These skills are the foundation for moving into more sophisticated levels of engagement, so all developing practitioners experience this learning before progressing in relational ability.

A New Threshold

As developing professionals grow through experience and training, professional confidence built on increasing competence allows practitioners to more fully focus on the needs and personal values of the person being helped. There is little worry about professional performance and this confidence permits the practitioner to listen better to what is happening for the other person. This is the point where a more professional level of thinking begins to emerge. Truly professional development entails a transformation of understanding that involves encountering threshold concepts (Steckley, 2020). Threshold concepts have five characteristics, they are *transformative* in enabling new ways of thinking and understanding, *irreversible* in that, once grasped, they become impossible to forget or unlearn, *integrative* in their ability to make visible relationships between ideas or phenomena, *bounded* in that they help to demarcate subject or disciplinary boundaries, and *troublesome* because they are counter-intuitive and difficult to grasp (Steckley).



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After at least one year of experience, the practitioner begins the developmental step of becoming a Treatment Planner and Change Agent (Phelan, 2017). The threshold concept process begins here, basically emerging as the practitioner lets his/her own needs recede and the young person/family becomes the primary focus. The troubling thought that being effective means that the worker's importance is diminished, and a successful outcome often does not include needing any contact or connection with the worker, becomes satisfying rather than disappointing. The shift from being a role model to building personal agency becomes obviously more useful. Practitioners at this level realize that supporting young peoples' personal power is the goal, not creating a clone of oneself.

When newer practitioners create attractive personas to build connection and closeness, they are creating a focus on themselves, drawing reluctant young people to themselves despite a natural resistance to closeness. We previously discussed the limitations of this approach, particularly the lack of long-term value. Level 2 practitioners realize this and now focus on supporting the young person to like him/herself, not the helper. The ability to create this result requires a mature practice philosophy that reduces the need for recognition and acknowledges the ultimate necessity of personal agency on the part of the young person/family.

Threshold Concepts

Relational practice has been described as a threshold concept (Steckley, 2020) for our profession. When relational practice is understood at a complex level it creates a change in the thinking and attitude of the learner that is transformational, irreversible, integrative, bounded and troublesome. Without delving into the complexity of threshold ideas (an



article is referenced), I would like to posit that relational practice is more elaborate and harder to grasp than the relationship model of the Competent Care Giver. The curiosity and motivation to develop more elaborate personal models and theories about relational practice begin to emerge as the practitioner shifts developmentally from Level 1 practice as a Competent Care Giver into Level 2 practice, the Treatment Planner and Change Agent (Phelan, 2017). CYC practitioners at this level of professional development realize the limitations of relationship building which is based on the presence of the helper and role modeling which has little enduring value. Also, a reduction in a self-focus along with heightened awareness of the needs of the other person, create a new awareness of how to be useful.

This way of thinking about how to be effective shifts the professional practice model of the level 2 practitioner because they are starting to grasp a threshold concept. Thinking about relational connections now becomes troublesome, because relying on personal attraction is now seen as unsatisfactory, plus the transformative belief that the helper is most useful when the person being helped doesn't need them, and an irreversible new focus on the agency and belief system of the young person or family. This new model is integrative because it explains why previous thinking has not produced expected results and bounded in that it focusses on the need for empathy, self-authoring thinking, and relational energy to create change.

Empathy

The type of empathy which characterizes the Competent Care Giver is based on the perceptions of the helper, typically framed as “how would I feel if that situation had happened to me?” Again, this is a thinking style that bases everything on the practitioner's reality, which is not that useful when dealing with people who think very differently. Most people



comfortably fall into this mode of relating to others, which is why we all get along better with people who share a lot of living experiences in common with us.

The empathy ability at this new level of awareness is built upon the transformative process of realizing that we must let go of our self focus and be willing to experience the other person's reality to understand what is needed. When the practitioner's self focus is muted, he/she can listen more intently to what the other person is trying to tell them. When behaviors or verbal communications seem illogical or foolish, now the practitioner becomes curious rather than judgemental, wondering what he/she doesn't understand about the situation, rather than dismissing the other person. When the practitioner who is developing into a Treatment Planner and Change Agent listens in this heightened way, he/she is no longer able to ignore the obvious clarity and logic of the other person. This does not mean that the other person is seeing the world in a useful way, but that they are truly making sense of the world that they have experienced. Skilled practitioners who have achieved this insight look back with embarrassment at some of the clumsy conversations they have engaged in with young people and families in their early years of practice. This empathy awareness is irreversible and is part of the threshold concept journey.

Humility inherently follows this empathy skill, which is described as the ability to stay curious and unthreatened when confronted with attitudes and beliefs that contradict your own cherished ideas about life truths (Phelan, 2015, p.82). The professional maturity required to achieve this level of empathy and humility emphasizes the obvious need to have a muted self focus. Practitioners who can comprehend this gap between themselves and the other person begin to grasp the challenge of



validating the logic and lived experience of someone who has experienced enormous pain in his life. The realization dawns on the practitioner that most of our awareness of the other person has been seriously limited by our own view of reality.

Strength Based Practice

Most programs and practitioners claim to be strength based, but in truth these strengths often are limited to a short list of prescribed program outcomes that do not fit the life logic of our charges. When a CYC practitioner achieves this level of relational skill, he/she begins to see strengths in many behaviors and attitudes that used to be framed as problems. Negative descriptions of behaviours labelled resistance, aggressiveness, withdrawal and even neglect and abuse are now reimagined as positive energy that can be utilized to create healthy resilience. This transformed defining of the other person can now become the bridge that begins to create a partnership in the relational journey. This ability to listen openly, replacing judgements with curiosity, is not possible until the practitioner has developed maturity through practice experience, which is a developmental journey.

The realization of how much strength is present in the young person or family which has enabled them to survive transforms the practitioner's approach quite dramatically. The young person or family quickly pick up on this change of attitude and begin to feel validated for their life logic. The respect communicated by the helper creates a transformed connection that becomes the new basis for sharing strategies and influences, as well as building a mutual empathy. There is a real *inter-personal in-between* (Garfat, 2014) now where both parties can choose to participate.



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Relational practice begins to shift significantly at this point because the threshold concept process has taken hold and there is a clear direction forward.

Self-Authoring Thinking

Adult thinking can progress developmentally from the socialized type, which prizes personal approval from others and a view of relationships where we are each responsible for maintaining the good will between us, to self-authoring thinking, which emphasizes personal responsibility for my own thoughts and beliefs. Kegan (1982) describes this shift as a heightened awareness of personal boundaries, and an increased responsibility for one's own behavior, beliefs and thoughts. Adults who are self-authoring thinkers are clear about personal responsibility and agency, they own their problems and resist persuasion based on what others want. The judgements, beliefs and behaviors of others are feedback that we can choose to use or ignore. Modlin (2015) has developed these ideas in a CYC context to suggest that relational practice requires self-authoring thinking. Modlin recommends building training and supervision models that emphasize *how to think* rather than *what to think* as we develop relational practitioners.

The Other Awareness Paradox

Building other awareness in people who have been unable to care about others is a vital part of the helping process. The ability to have a focus on social interactions that promote cooperation and connection will create developmental progress in young people and adults who are mired in protective, ego-centric logic. So relational practice should bolster and nourish the need to consider other's feelings and opinions when choosing



how to behave. As the Golden Rule starts to become more sensible, people will discover new ways to get their needs met that will be more useful and less troublesome.

CYC practitioners can create strategies that will arrange practical examples to support other awareness. The life space is a powerful arena to arrange experiences that will challenge young people to start considering other people's point of view. Role modelling ideas learned previously can assist practitioners to build on the positive experiences of connection to include other people's needs, not just their own. The Level 2 practitioner can structure interactions in a planful way with a clear emphasis on other-awareness learning.

Paradoxically, simultaneous to supporting other awareness for young people and families, the developing practitioner also must reduce the influence of other people's opinions on him/herself. Becoming more self-authoring requires the practitioner to reflect less on what others do and take more ownership of his/her own thoughts and beliefs. Therefore, the Level 2 relational practitioner must both increase other awareness for the person he/she is helping and decrease other people's influence on his/her behavior at the same time. CYC supervisors are especially important here, as this can be a huge challenge at this juncture in one's career.

The reduction of outside influence while building social sensitivity in others is one of those counter-intuitive threshold concepts that will not be understandable to inexperienced CYC practitioners. The nurturing of this idea often requires a More Knowledgeable Other (Vygotsky, 2004)) who can support newer relational practitioners in their professional development journey. Once this threshold is achieved, it is an irreversible understanding.



CYC supervisors must have several years of direct care experience and have mastered the Threshold Concept of relational child and youth care practice to enable them to create this shift in others. Teachers and trainers have a similar requirement if they intend to support relational ideas.

Treatment Ideas

The Level 2 practitioner is now capable of more skillfully applying the CYC theory that had been learned as a student. The relational connections that are beginning to grow have enabled the practitioner to build influence as well as humility, so there is increasing willingness to both listen and be heard. Treatment theories that seemed too impractical because they were clumsily offered and explained, now can be thoughtfully discussed and experimented with in the life space. Theories about how people change are also considered and utilized. The Level 2 practitioner still needs to deliberately plan an agenda for intervention and try to anticipate life space opportunities, but that will shift at the next level of professional development.

The Creative, Free Thinking Professional

Relational CYC practice has been developing steadily throughout the maturing process of the Level 2 practitioner, and after a few years another threshold of awareness will be achieved. The conscious treatment agenda prevalent at Level 2 practice can now be applied in a more natural way by the Level 3 relational practitioner.

Life Space

CYC practice is embedded in the use of the life space as the arena for interactions. While the Level 1 practitioner struggles to maintain safety in



the life space environment, and the Level 2 practitioner uses the life space as a conscious teaching arena, the Level 3 practitioner is fully immersed in the life space. Level 3 practitioners cannot imagine preferring an office or any other artificially constructed place to the natural energy and raw honesty of real situations. The creation of the *inter-personal in-between* space includes a balancing of power and control dynamics and a physical sharing of emotional energy that demands authentic presence. The respect for conflicting truths about life logic has been gradually achieved by both parties, and this relational connection will now enable an honest comparison and discussion about healthy responses to life challenges. The young people and families we support are very aware of how easy it is to give advice and direction from the safe place where helpers live, while ignoring how distressing their situation truly feels. When the practitioner can stand with them and experience the distress also, then they deserve to be listened to. Offices do not support this type of connection.

Praxis

Praxis, which is ethical, self-aware, responsive, and accountable action involves the reciprocal integration of knowing, doing and being (White, 2012 p.118). This concept of praxis has been used to describe the integration and sophistication of CYC skills which I describe as a Level 3 practitioner. The details described in White's excellent article echo much of the information about trust, mutual power, presence, and respect that are the relational hallmarks. Praxis is a clear goal for developing CYC practitioners and I encourage the reader to become more informed through the literature available about this idea.



Use of Self

Awareness about self continues to grow as this threshold is crossed and Level 3 practice becomes integrated. Self awareness is a lifelong journey of negotiating relational dynamics, and Kegan states that self-authoring thinkers can differentiate the boundary between themselves and the rest of the world. Practitioners at this level realize that the only tool they really bring to the healing process is themselves and yet this sense of self is quite different from the self-focused early practitioner. Attitudes learned by absorbing the threshold concepts about relational practice have convinced practitioners that personal agency, not behavioral imitation is the goal while imposing ones' logic about life's truths on another is not useful. The expanded knowledge about self also leads to a strong respect for other selves, personal responsibility, and the process of change. Relational thinking is more complex now and new strategies about how to be supportive begin to emerge.

Co-experiencing and New Boundaries

Relational practice involves joining people in the pain and confusion of their lives. This willingness to deeply engage has many difficulties, yet there is no inter-personal in-between without it. Emotional pain is a major factor in the lives of people who have experienced severe trauma, abuse and neglect. The ability to co-experience this pain requires complex boundaries and emotional maturity. Jim Anglin has focussed us on the need to co-experience the pain being presented by young people and families in his study of group homes in British Columbia, Canada (Anglin, 2003). Anglin basically concluded that effective CYC practitioners were the people able to co-experience the pain being expressed by the young people in the programs.



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The boundary dynamics in creating this connection require the practitioner to hold two positions simultaneously; he/she must experience the emotional and cognitive experience of the other person while maintaining personal integrity. If this is not done, the practitioner will either argue with the other's experience or succumb to the often-overwhelming content. The ability to create connections at this level requires professional maturity that is grounded in a complex understanding of self and other.

Scaffolding Self-Awareness Development

The gradual shift in the practitioner's self focus is a key issue for relational practice. The early stage of practitioner development is characterized by placing one's own needs above others, until personal safety and competence have been achieved. Relational threshold concepts emerge, and the awareness of the other person and his needs becomes powerful, with a reduction in self focus. Then the maturing practitioner begins to define his own presence and agency, with a growing sense of self on a more complex level. The fully relational practitioner now has a self and other awareness that enables her/him to engage with people in the inter-personal in-between as a Creative, Free Thinking Professional.

Connection Complexity

As was stated at the beginning of this article, the basic definition of relational is **connection**. It is the way that connection is understood that differentiates practitioner approaches.

At the first level, connection is built on a mutual liking that requires both parties to validate the quality of the relationship by external reinforcement. The limitation of this type of connection is that when either



person stops expressing the liking, there is no ongoing value to the connection. Basically, both parties require the other 's presence and expression of caring, which evaporates after the connection is terminated. The helper defines his/her role as one half of a mutual caring experience.

At the second level, the connection is based on building self worth in the person being helped, with less emphasis on the helper's presence. The value of the connecting experience can endure after the connection has ended. The helper defines his role as creating a caring belief in the other person that includes being able to care and being deserving of care. The personal agency of the other person replaces the need for helper presence.

At the third level, connection is based on the helper being able to co-experience the reality of the other and to build a space to compare responses to this reality with respect and openness. The connection is a total engagement based on safety and trust.

In a simple framework, practitioners' relational connections begin as a focus on **me**, build to a focus on **you**, then shift to a focus on **us**.

Thinking About Self

CYC supervisors and trainers can support practitioners to engage in self-awareness that builds skilled relational practitioners. Thinking about engagement becomes more complex through professional maturity based on years of experience and training. It is not possible to achieve relational maturity through a purely cognitive awareness, and experience without theoretical understanding will not create the threshold concept development either. To quote Modlin, it is not what the practitioner thinks, but how they think which should be our training focus. Relationships which are the common connection among friends do not really build into relational practice without professional training.



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Fighting for Care, Fighting for our Elders

Kiaras Charabaghi

It hasn't been a good year; surely that's the understatement of our time. Quite aside from the hardships, inequities and fragilities that have emerged during this year across so many different contexts once again, the young people we often find ourselves with as child and youth care practitioners have had a particularly difficult ride through this pandemic. It's hard to be homeless, unemployed, out of school, challenged by addictions and mental health issues, all the while wondering where one belongs, who one can trust, and whether or not there will be a tomorrow. For young people facing all that and racism on top of that, this year featured few good news items. Gender identities, sexual identities, disability and various combinations of all of these things really find no meaningful response during times when much of the world is worried about '*The Economy*', as if it were a close friend, a real person, someone to protect ahead of the expendable lives of many of our youth.

And still, as we approach the holiday season and the end of the calendar year in many cultural and spiritual contexts, I find myself searching for the good, just to maintain a reason to believe that things can be better. And there is plenty of good to be found, almost all of it the work and contribution of people like you – youth workers, community workers and activists, child and youth care practitioners, outreach workers, artists, performers and musicians engaged with young people by whatever



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means. I can't believe the work that is being done by individuals and by groups of people – they just don't give up, their own fragilities notwithstanding.

In my geography, which like everyone else's has re-localized so to speak given the absence of travel these days, I marvel at the work being done in institutional settings like group homes and live-in treatment centres, in schools, and in non-institutional community settings. I also marvel at the capacity building that continues through grassroots organizations engaging communities of practitioners on issues ranging from anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, gender rights, ableism, and responding to the opiate crisis especially in the big city. Not being able to do some things in person hasn't stopped our field (broadly speaking) to remain engaged, to work hard, and to seek change for the better, sometimes one young person at a time, and sometimes systemically and structurally.

These days, while I am tired like everyone else, and while I hope for a better 2021, even if we have to wait for a few more months before it might feel a little better, I still feel good knowing what people I care about, respect and look up to are doing. This pandemic has shaken all of us, but child and youth care, youth work, and community work are far from dead.

And yet, I am bothered by something that seems so obvious and yet feels very distant in our field(s). I generally center concepts rather than people when I think about what child and youth care practice means to me. The kinds of concepts that usually figure high on my list include first and foremost the concept of care, whereby I want to be clear that I reject the professionalized version of care and instead aim for a much more authentic, less system-driven version of the practice of care. I center concepts such as connection, mattering, and representation. And perhaps most importantly, I center concepts of autonomy within community(ies),



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within spiritual spaces and within imaginary places. I center value-ing humanity *as an action*, an intentional way of being in the world that transcends binaries of individualism and collectivity.

Because I center concepts more so than particular people, I don't see myself as youth-centered. I see myself instead as care-centered. And when I reflect on this year, I see some urgency for our field(s), our people, to re-mobilize and be ready for another battle. Forgive the military terminology – I am simply reclaiming the language of revolutionary struggle, which does not require violence or physical assault of any kind.

This year, our collective complacency toward the humanity of the Elders has been brutally exposed – our Elders – our roots, our wisdom, our histories. It was somewhat of a story early into the pandemic, largely because the virus spread rapidly and with devastating consequence in nursing homes and group homes for the elderly. At the time, we heard every day of the abuse, the abject conditions of life, the neglect, the throw-away culture that has settled within the 'care system' for elderly people. And as always, it impacted most severely and in the most deadly fashion on Elders with fewer resources, less socio-economic capital, and limited social connections. Indeed, we (once again) were given an enormous amount of information about what happens to the Elders in institutional settings. In Canada, after multiple waves of mass deaths in such institutions, the federal government sent in the army! And the soldiers talked about their experiences after a few weeks on the job. In brief, they more or less described the conditions they encountered in these institutions as war zones, as worse than what they encountered on their tours of duty in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The story has quieted down in recent months, save for the occasional outbreak and consequent multiple deaths of *non-descript and anonymous*



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old people. Hardly much of a story when our friend, our lover, or intimate partner – *The Economy* – is struggling and in pain.

In reality, in Canada and in many other countries around the world, we have abandoned our Elders – someone’s fathers, someone’s mothers. We knowingly and with intention throw them into the heap of garbage we know is waiting for them in some of the worst instances of institutional neglect and abuse. We let them die, without dignity, without care, without love. They are The Economy’s excrement.

We should have known this all along. But 2020 is the year when we have run out of excuses. It is the year when all of us have become complicit. Because we know what we know. The evidence is overwhelming, it is accessible to everyone, and it has been verified by workers, families, communities, the army, the government and everybody else. I would love to say it has been verified by the Elders – but they have no voice; they are silenced upon admission.

As child and youth care practitioners, youth workers, and community workers, we must mobilize in defense of our Elders. The Elders are the mirror image of our young people. They are embodied in every child and in every youth. They are embodied in us. *They are Us*.

If child and youth care, however defined, centers the concept of care, then we cannot go on living in a world in which we allow for the neglect, abuse and discarding of our Elders. What is the value of centering youth in our practice while complacently accepting their abuse at another stage of life? Are we honest with our youth? Do we tell them that we are here for them now, but we will look the other way when they are the next generation of Elders left to sit, and sometimes die, in their feces?

In the medical world, dementia has been labelled as a neurological problem. I am convinced that in the spirit world, dementia is an expression



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of disbelief. When an Elder is looking beyond us, seemingly at nothing, they are seeing what we appear to be blind to; they are seeing the absence of care, the self-indulgence of people ignorant of their own fate.

2020 is the year that has exposed this horrifying truth such that no one can pretend to not know. We are the warriors of care. We must take on this fight. We must demand dignity for the Elders. We must insist on an honouring of the Elders that in some cultures and communities has maintained the spirit world for thousands of years, even in the face of genocides and horrific violence. Because if not us, then who?

Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Omisoka – this month, we will perform care in the name of our various cultural traditions. Notwithstanding the limitations we face this year in celebrating together as families and as communities, let us enjoy these moments of care for one another. We can be vulnerable, weak, sensitive and charming this month. *And then bring back the warriors!* We have a battle to wage. Our Elders deserve to see something again.

Happy Holidays!

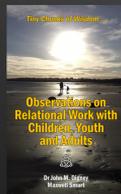
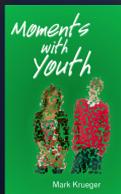
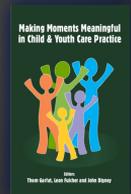
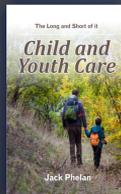
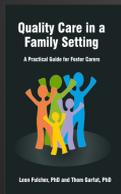
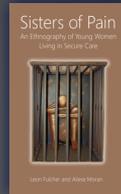
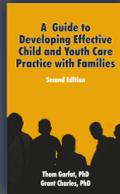
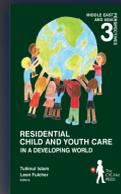
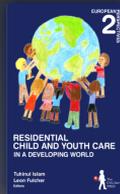
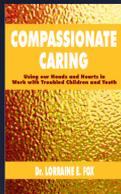
Kiaras

KIARAS GHARABAGHI is Professor in Child & Youth Care and Chair of Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada. He can be reached at k.gharabaghi@ryerson.ca



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The Peer Pressure Myth

Michael Ungar

Does peer pressure really exist? How can we understand the behaviour of a boy like 15-year-old Jonathan whom I met while he was being housed on a forensic psychiatry unit designed to treat young offenders with mental health problems? While incarcerated, Jonathan spent most of his spare time in his room which was painted in muted pastels with a magnetic locking door and a window made of unbreakable glass. The wire mesh outside reassures residents like Jonathan they are in detention. He liked the sense of predictable security while a patient there, knowing all he had to do was get up at 7:00 a.m., do chores, eat, go to school, play some sports, meet with his therapist, sit in his room for a time, and go back to bed. There were few choices to be made, and no one to put him down.

His parents visited, as did his girlfriend. They sat in the cafeteria under the constant gaze of a guard armed with a radio and a panic button. His parents sat on plastic chairs and drank weak tea and instant coffee from Styrofoam cups. Between failed attempts to share news about home, they kept asking him "Why?" Why had he put on a black balaclava and, along with another boy, shot out the window of an electronics store near his home with his own hunting rifle and then stolen several CD players? Jonathan shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Later, alone with his youth worker and I, we asked him the same question. He would only say that he had known he would get caught and that was what he'd wanted.



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His parents wanted to blame his friends. They'd told me that before he'd met them he'd played hockey, attended school regularly, was even part of the school chess club. There was no doubt in their mind that they were the reason Jonathan was in jail.

What Jonathan eventually told me, though, was that his father makes a point of telling him he's an "idiot" every chance he gets. When I brought this up with Jonathan's dad he dismissed the comment, saying his son was being too sensitive. Still, Jonathan's story is hard to dismiss.

For Jonathan, time inside was an escape from home. His choice of peer group had been the same, a way out of feeling stuck playing the good kid. Jonathan could have turned to sports, or school, or even suicide to escape his home, all popular choices among his peers. But jail was to his mind an even better solution, he said, because it let everyone know just how "screwed-up" he felt inside. It also brought the worst kind of attention to his family, and that was what Jonathan really wanted.

Drifting toward a powerful identity

The myth of peer pressure has gone largely unchallenged by mental health practitioners working with youth like Jonathan. In part this is the result of how psychological research is done. The vast majority of studies use standardized instruments that set out to measure peer interactions in ways that reflect the bias of researchers who assume that kids influence one another in negative ways. A growing body of research that uses in-depth unstructured interviews with adolescents and lengthy periods of engagement with them in natural settings has tried to understand the world from the point of view of young people themselves (Robinson, 1994; Tyler, Tyler, Tommasello & Connolly, 1992, Ungar, 2000). When research is



done with the same methodological rigour as the studies that preceded them, the results have proven anything but predictable.

What we are learning is that youth exercise a high level of personal agency in their selection of peer groups. In fact, as a crop of new studies with teenaged mothers and drug addicted youth and delinquents have shown, catch a group of young people in the act of misbehaving and they will say their behaviour is part of a purposeful drift towards mental health (Ungar, 2002, in press). In a number of these studies, young people say that the power to control the labels that attach to them is the fulcrum upon which their mental health teeters. This is easy to demonstrate. Take for example a list of words communities typically use to describe problem youth:

- Loser
- Charity case
- Brat
- Stupid
- Victim
- Slut
- Drop-out
- Thief
- Little fucker.

Now add to this list the labels professionals assign these same youth and we quickly see why a child may choose to drift towards peers to feel good about themselves rather than coming home at night. Some of the most common clinical labels I encounter include:



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- Conduct disordered
- Parentified
- Attention deficit hyperactivity
- disordered
- Depressed
- Suicidal
- Borderline
- Antisocial
- Bi-polar
- Emotionally disturbed
- Dysfunctional
- Resistant
- Lacking impulse control
- Difficult.

Compounding the problem of dealing with these two lists is that teens who appear to have succumbed to “demoniac” pressures from peers are told by professionals in no uncertain terms that the likelihood is poor that they will soon shake off their clinical labels.

Phenomenological studies of high-risk youth have shown that young people challenge these negative identities that are forced upon them by exploiting opportunities to interact with peers. Sometimes youth are lucky. By chance, they encounter groups of youth that define themselves as academically talented, athletic or as volunteers and good citizens. Unfortunately, many if not most of the troubled youth whom we see on the nightly news make the most of whatever identities they can scrounge together. High-risk youth from resource-poor environments resist the



labels of their caregivers by choosing much more powerful names to be known by such as:

- Leader
- Tough
- Gang member
- Dealer
- Sexy
- Survivor
- Stud
- Street kid
- Helper
- Drinker
- Fighter.

In the limited ocean of possibilities available to these young people, playing at being bad with other teens can sometimes be the best strategy to feel good.

Studies of peer group interactions, however, like those conducted by Bradford Brown and his colleagues (Brown & Lohr, 1987), were designed to show that the misconduct of youth is *related* to peer pressure . Such studies have tended to make real the power of the adolescent peer group while ignoring the personal agency of its individual members as they struggle to find health. There is a better way to understand what we are seeing.



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The Relational Self

Having a large and diverse group of friends adds to the control a teenager experiences over his or her identity. As Kenneth Gergen (1991), the well-known American critical psychologist explains, what we take to be the “self” is better understood as a “relational self” constructed through interactions with others.

For youth like Jonathan in pursuit of a powerful identity there may be no better place to shop for one than with other troubled peers. Together a group of problem youth can scream “This is who I am” and “I’m not who you think” louder than if each acts alone.

Authors like Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, 1982; Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995), Judith Rich (1998) and Nancy Lesko (2001) have taken a more optimistic view of adolescent peer group interactions, finding them necessary for cognitive and emotional growth but recognizing that adults frequently misperceive the internal dynamics of the group. As adults it seems, we are chronically prone to forgetting how it was when we were young. We conveniently overlook how adolescents practise building a powerful identity among their peers not unlike the way younger children in studies by Carolyn Webster-Stratton (2001) have been observed practising these same skills at home.

It can be confusing for caregivers to figure out which behaviours offer adolescents the best opportunities for healthy development. What’s more, for youth growing up under adversity, they argue that sometimes when resources are in scarce supply (jobs, money, academic success, safe communities, equal opportunity) the only way they may achieve this growth is through deviant, delinquent and disordered means. When we ask youth to explain their choices, avoiding our tendency to prejudge their



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answers, teens tell us that peer group interactions are solutions, not problems, to lives lived at-risk.

Compelling evidence from studies of street youth by researchers such as John Hagan (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and Stephen Tyler (Tyler, Tyler, Tommasello & Connolly, 1992) have shown that peer group identification bolsters health. What's more, associating with one's peer group prevents feelings of alienation even when that identification is with a group of delinquents. If we are to understand why our children drift into problem behaviours when with their peers we need to hear them when they tell us their behaviour is a purposeful search for a pathway to resilience. The peer group acts as a place where youth develop the skills needed to privilege an individual and collective identity of their own choosing. Seen from outside the peer group, it can appear to parents and other caregivers that the peer group exerts a corrupting influence (peer pressure) when in fact youth themselves say that their peer groups offer them a place to practise behaviours that they view as health-enhancing.



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Deviant pathways to survival

Such a theory will provide little consolation to Jonathan's parents unless they hear what Jonathan is trying to communicate. Undoubtedly, Jonathan's peer group had played its part helping him to become a delinquent. He had drifted towards them like a ship without an anchor, finding among them a natural place for a big moody kid like himself. He wasn't looking to be a delinquent. He was looking for a powerful identity that would wrestle back from his parents any say over who he is going to be.

He developed his career as a young offender in stages, first drifting away from long established friendships with friends who didn't break the law but to his mind held no real status in his community. Terrie Moffitt's (1997) work over the past two decades has shown us convincingly that only a core five percent of youth persist with their delinquent behaviours into adulthood. That five percent, however, can offer youth like Jonathan a well-marked path towards a self-construction as something other than an emotionally abused child.

Jonathan explained it was easier being a violent delinquent than staying at home and arguing for his right to be treated with respect. Sad, really, because Jonathan's parents didn't mean to hurt him. In their own way they'd tried to love him. In fact, within weeks of our meeting all together, his family were making changes that would make it easier for Jonathan to return home.

This is where professionals can help. At a recent inter- national conference held in Halifax and hosted by the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships, researchers like Steven Asher (2002) demonstrated that children who feel rejected and lonely want help to develop competencies to be a better friend and game participant. Both



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boys and girls, according to Asher, want to perfect the skills necessary to participate with their peers in ways that bring them recognition as special. When those groups promote behaviour we approve of children are applauded for seeking them out. The problem is that for many youth, the groups that offer them the quickest way to a powerful relational sense of self are made up of other marginalized youth whose choice of behaviour may not be widely accepted.

Relationships that make sense

Studies by researchers like Karl Bauman and Susan Ennett (1996) who have looked beyond the myth of peer pressure, are showing that peer group influence (for example, to take drugs) is greatly exaggerated. They argue that the strong and consistent correlation between an adolescent's drug use and that of his or her peers can best be explained by a young person's selection of friends and the projection of personal behaviours onto peers. In other words, the causal relationship between a teen and his or her peer group is opposite to that implied by the term peer pressure.

If teens drift into associations with other troubled peers, it is because those relationships make sense to the child. Cynthia Lightfoot (1992), Robin Robinson (1994) and many others have all demonstrated the same thing: that risk-taking behaviours bring to teens feelings of group cohesion and enhanced mental health. When Robinson studied the way teenaged girls coped with the trauma of sexual abuse, she found the healthiest ones were those that used problematic public behaviours and associated with problem peers. Drawing an interesting link between attitudes toward delinquent girls, witch trials and the way young female workers were treated in factory dormitories in the early-to mid-1800s, Robinson shows that we tend to have a problem with young women who say "No" to



abusive situations and assert their rights to self-determination. What we know from the work of feminist authors like Robinson is that girls are most effective at mounting an opposition to oppressive standards of conformity when they work together with other girls. The result is that girls become engaged in “crimes of survival” that allow them to thrive despite histories of abuse.

New stories or persistent old ones?

If these adolescents resist treatment and migrate to their peers, it is only because within the peer group a teen has more power than in places where adults run the show. Teens can negotiate with their peers for an identity that is partly of their own choosing. I say partly, because research shows that power is not shared equally among all youth. Some youth are better able to negotiate an acceptable and high status identity than others.

Any wonder that children’s author Robert Munsch (1980) has sold more than a million copies of an anti-fairy tale called *The Paper Bag Princess*? In Munsch’s tale, Elizabeth, a beautiful princess with expensive princess clothes is to marry Prince Ronald. At least that is until a dragon smashes the castle, burns all her clothes and carries off the Prince. Angry, Elizabeth puts on the only thing not burnt, a paper bag, and chases after the dragon, eventually outsmarting him and rescuing her Prince. But Prince Ronald will have nothing to do with Princess Elizabeth. He tells her, “You are a mess! You smell like ashes, your hair is all tangled and you are wearing a dirty old paper bag. Come back when you are dressed like a real princess.” Elizabeth, to her credit and the credit of all young women like her, tells Ronald he is a “bum” and decides not to get married after all.

Certainly, some teens like the mythical Elizabeth have more luck, more talents, more money, more self-confidence, or just better genes which



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make it more likely they will succeed. Whatever the case may be, building a healthy identity takes resources, both the internal and external kind.

Maybe that's why, when I managed to get free tickets for several of the youth with whom I worked to see a main stage live production of "A Christmas Tale", things didn't go as planned. Not surprisingly, for most of these teenagers who came from low-income housing projects, it was their first time in a posh theatre, sitting amongst people who intimidated them for no other reason than who they are. I remember sadly how Amanda, a talented and bright young woman who lived in disparaging conditions in low-rent housing with her alcoholic parents had nervously agreed to come along. She had shown up dressed very appropriately for the occasion in a navy coloured dress and a white blouse, her long red hair pinned. When I asked her at the intermission if she was enjoying the show, she looked at me accusingly and said that she felt really uncomfortable. "I don't belong here," she hissed at me. "I'm not like these people." Try as I might to convince her otherwise, Amanda would not believe that no one else thought her out of place.

To my knowledge, Amanda never did find her way back to the theatre. The last time I met her she was 20 years old, a single mother with two young children, visibly anorexic, and involved with a 35-year-old alcoholic in jail for manslaughter. The world she had drifted back to was the one she could most comfortably negotiate, populated with peers who accepted her as she wanted to be. There she knew the rules and though that world made me feel uncomfortable with its violence and drugs, it was where she had come to believe she belonged.

For Jonathan, our time together ended on a more positive note. Eight months after we met, he left a secure group home where he'd been transferred as part of his sentence. I remember being at the security desk



at the front of that facility the day he was being checked out. He had three green garbage bags of clothes at his feet. His hair had been buzz cut, he wore tattered army surplus pants, and a wallet on a chain hung from his hip. Jonathan didn't smile as his dad picked up two of the bags and shook hands with staff. But he did look to see if his favourite youth worker had come to say good-bye. Security radioed a message back to the living unit and the worker ambled down. I couldn't tell exactly what was going on inside Jonathan's head, but in his eyes he looked slightly afraid as we shook hands and he turned to leave. Maybe the fear was just mine. I wasn't quite sure what he would have to do next time to catch our attention, nor who he would associate with to make himself feel powerful. I don't think he knew either as he walked out through the double-locking doors, but his sadness at saying good-bye to the staff of the centre told me that he had found something inside for which he'd been looking.

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Pandemonium

Garth Goodwin

I find myself thinking of meeting Brian Gannon, founding co-editor of CYC-Net. Founding co-editor Thom Garfat arranged for the group of Canadians to meet Brian at his home in Cape Town. Brian was a founder of the National Association of Child Care Worker's in South Africa. Back in the day with the opening of the internet to everyone I had established a web site for our provincial association and for the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations, the first such publications for child and youth care. I kept looking for others and soon after up popped the NACCW web site. Over several decades following child and youth care networking developed apace to the 40th Anniversary Conference for the organization. I was a little nervous to meet the man who published the "*Relational*" journal for which I wrote a column. He did not disappoint taking me aside for a chat with a statement that both established he knew me, expressed a concern and left me with a life task stating simply: "You are very serious." I was born serious and took things seriously from the get-go. Friends would support this arguing that few people took current affairs and the news as earnestly. There were comments of Danny Downer over the years. I got the message to let it go in retirement that was implied by this wise elder. Those who have followed my columns realize this was with mixed success. As the year ends and the new year brings its promise of a new President in the United States and the eradication of Covid-19 even this writer has had his fill of being serious. This column explores my disorientation with reality currently.



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Like many I was counting down the days to the US election on November 20th. It became a period of an election with an outcome that was not in doubt, but which remained in doubt for the president and his party right up to the moment. His first denial of loss exposed a weakness of character despite all the networks running historic footage of the protocols of the transition to remind all involved how it all works. Soon, the President of the United States was presenting behaviour as glaringly like any meltdown and ugliness displayed by youth in my practice over the years. Sadly, this was presidential level pathology like reviving executions following a progressive period of 17 years execution free. There is this list of individuals leaving death row being worked through, black individuals primarily and some possibly questionable sentencing for a morally progressive thinker. Progressive thought eludes this president though as he went on to demonstrate appearing to believe he had a lock on the Supreme Court fully expecting the court to overturn the election on undemonstrated fraud. He saw only his own numbers, some 74 million votes and the Republican Party supporting his views, essentially holding the constitution hostage for a potential another four years while pulling in a quarter of a million dollars to bankroll such nonsense. With the vaccine arriving the White House, a known death zone equal or stronger than any long-term care was proposed to receive vaccination to all those central to the proximity to the president, but this was rejected by the president who is clutching to his infamous negativity right up to the end. For a serious person, this kind of thing leads to a kind of burn out, a numbness, sense of isolation from common sense only reinforced by the actual isolation where the only thing you can and have to count on, is your own survival.

Authoritarian behaviour is quite common in society and in child and youth care. It is quite different from authoritative behaviour which is



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informed and empathic. Essentially, the individual uses the status and/or powers of the office they hold to get what they want regardless of your involvement. Fate we can accept as change does happen and does force situations to change. In my private owned and operated youth care I came to realize the whole approach literally granted near absolute power to the boss. While some were enlightened, educated and engaged some were simply in group care as an investment. Many defined their own philosophy of care to attract staff. In those days, they had the advantage of a general ignorance of child and youth care to take advantage of their staff, their clients and the system itself. As with the president, time and exposure alters one's view and a once impressive presentation came down to total self-interest and absolute loyalty literally bought and paid for through supervisions over lunches, shopping weekends and bonuses. There have also been a few incidents that were totally, personally traumatic. One involved fate forcing a change of supervisor. I was sat down to consider taking time to look after myself to the extent the message was, I leave the team. This was denied and the whole thing was repeated over and over. It was all so insane I took sick leave and counselling. An alternative position was found for me in the end and over three months the entire team was similarly removed from the unit, a successful regime change. The other involved an individual being awarded the authority to oversee a range of activities I had pioneered and was constantly engaged in. The individual made an impossible deal which totally disregarded my history, investment and artistic rights. The tactic was to ignore me throughout. It all came to a breach and the loss of three years of engagement for the entity and my life work for me. The immaturity of child and youth care practice was exposed to me with these incidents. Morals, ethics and simple fairness remain more ideals than realities. Systems of care operate in a privacy that has marked



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them from the beginning. The authoritarian versus relational approach remains in an elaborate dance throughout. Many treat young people at risk as objects to be moved on a whim, endure rude put downs, racism and sadly as numbers in a constant stream. It falls to the individual child and youth care practitioner to connect and make a difference for the young person. Do this enough and you will succeed regardless of the deficiencies of your employer or agency.

One of the most remarkable side effects of the Trump era must be his success at working the media often in the early a.m. hours on social media. His posts were considered news as he made them. Most would agree that they and their thoughts are not worthy of publication, yet the world ate it up and still does to the exclusion of real, serious news. This great distraction has clouded realization that this last November was the warmest month in recorded history, the Arctic climate is changing, epic fires, floods and storms continue, 8 million have slipped into poverty in the USA. One of the most disturbing images has been the long lines of cars and trucks in line for donated food as they are considered food insecure. The actual numbers remain unknown beyond the agreement they will increase. There is much that is unknown: the abuse children and youth are enduring especially as the red flags for such abuse keep popping up, the numbers of medical procedures and interventions being cancelled, species extinctions, and these insane stand offs between the haves and the have nots in the political world around the world.

And yet, millions from the couple living in their van in Florida to her Majesty and His Royal Highness in Windsor Castle are isolating from family on Christmas Day and have led altered lives since last March. Government's have had to just go ahead in the fight against the virus and the many emerging fights around human rights and culture. The president has been



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a legendary tight wad for his people. That kind of thought is going to be challenged as people accept the economy is more than profit, it is the collaborative endeavor of people the world over to maintain lives, homes and communities. The millennium new year was epic but this one with its promise of the end of the Trump era, the end of the pandemic and the promise to begin the economy again for the good of all. Seriously, this can happen and more. New Year's blessings.

GARTH GOODWIN spent his 41-year career in both practice and as a database designer and administrator. In over 30 years of frontline practice he worked for both public/board and private agencies. He was the first recipient of the National Child and Youth Care Award in 1986. He nurtured the Child and Youth Care Workers Association of Manitoba through its formative years and became its representative to the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations. He has been privileged to be the witness and participant in significant events in CYC history and remains an active observer in the field of CYC.

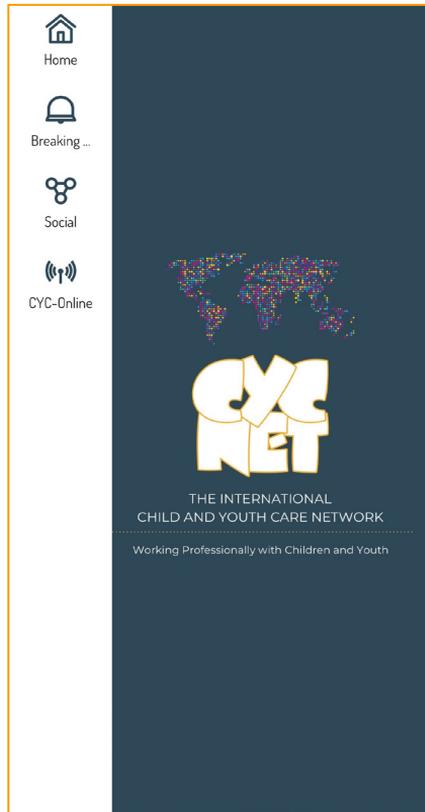


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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

From the start of the America's Cup Regatta in Auckland

Kia Ora Kotou Katoa and Warm Greetings everyone - wherever you are as we start a New Year! The world of sailing - indeed the sporting world everywhere - focused in the days before Christmas on introductory yacht racing in Auckland harbour at the start of the next America's Cup Regatta. The sporting world may well have followed our America's Cup racing since it happened in the only country of the world that is Covid-19-free within our national borders. The public participated fully as spectators of these races without pandemic restrictions.

In the end, three single-hull boats - from Italy, Britain, and the

USA - have joined in the challenge to race against the Cup holder New Zealand in March. The Prada Challenger Cup begins mid-January and will consist of round-robin races between the challengers. The new America's Cup racing boats are designed like airplanes, with hydraulic foils that are



The Prada Christmas Cup saw the first races between 4 America's Cup boats



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powered by hefty crewmen called Grinders who, on some boats use their legs as cyclists while others grind with their arms.

The Italian boat – Luna Rossa – has the experienced Australian Jimmy Spittle at the helm.

Spittle came close as the challenger during the Bahamas Regatta. Many think Luna Rossa will be the key challenger in this year’s Auckland Regatta. But American Magic is the challenger well placed to give Luna Rossa serious boat racing during the Prada Challengers Cup in mid-January.

It may be of interest to learn that the America’s Cup Sailing Regatta dates back to 1851 and is the oldest international



Luna Rossa and American Magic are leading challengers for the America's Cup



Boats are now single hull with hydraulic foils that let boats exceed speeds of 40 knots

sporting event in the world. The history and prestige associated with the America's Cup attracts not only the world's top sailors and yacht designers but also the involvement of wealthy entrepreneurs and sponsors. It is a test not only of sailing skill and boat and sail design, but also of fundraising and management skills. Competing for the cup is expensive, with modern teams spending more than \$US100 million each!

As an island nation, New Zealand has always lived with the sea. With temperate climates, learning to sail, using a boogie-board, sailboard or windsurfing is part of youthful



New single-hull oil boats require 7-8 kph wind to launch onto their foils



The American boat has the experienced New Zealander Dean Barker at the helm

summers. The technology associated with sailing has advanced dramatically through New Zealand innovations, with the foil enabling a boat or wind-surfing board to literally 'fly' above the water!

Racing was delayed when average wind speeds dropped below 7 knots (8 mph). Such winds are needed for the new racing yachts to lift out of the water onto their foils and start

'flying' through a proscribed race course, sometime reaching speeds in excess of 40 knots (almost 50 mph). Time will tell what dangers might occur if one of these new sailing boats were to capsize at high speed.



New Zealand is holder of the America's Cup after the last regatta in the Bahamas

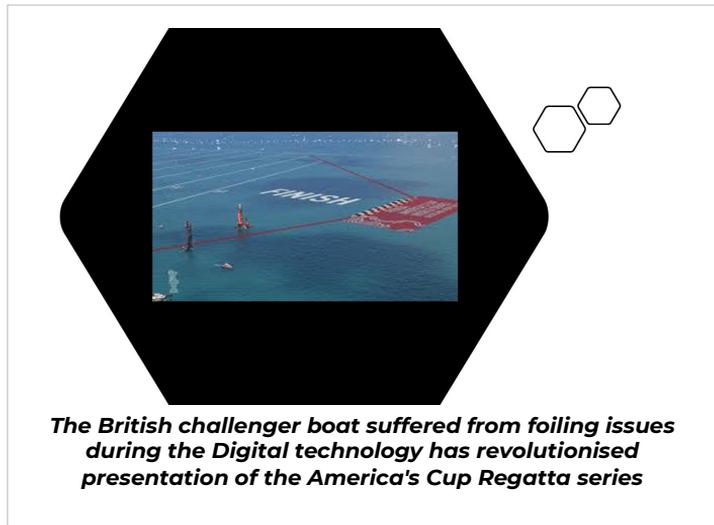


The British challenger boat suffered from foiling issues during the Christmas series

One of the most amazing features of the start of New Zealand's hosting of the America's Cup Regatta is that it is the only place in the world where real people are gathering together safely during the Covid-19 pandemic to celebrate America's Cup Yacht Racing again.

It's interesting how children's 'learning to sail' opportunities are commonly over-subscribed as the Auckland Regatta progresses. All New Zealanders can watch every race on free-to-air television, with advances in digital technology making yacht racing accessible to everyone. Whereas America's Cup races once lasted up to 3 hours, the new foiling boats race in 25 minutes!

Youthful involvement in using GPS signals, drones and digital monitoring help to plot each racing boat as it progresses up and down GPS coordinates on one of 6 selected racing fields or zones. Old sailors might be heard to use the old Star Trek saying, "there's life Jim, but not as you know it!"



Information

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Founding Editors

Thom Garfat

thom@cyc-net.org

Brian Gannon (1939-2017)

Managing Editor

Martin Stabrey

Associate Editors

Mark Smith, James Freeman, Janice Daley

Correspondence

The Editors welcome your input, comment, requests, etc.

Write to cyconline@cyc-net.org

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In general:

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