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Celebrating Relational Child & Youth Care Practice: Around the World

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Celebrating Relational Child and Youth Care Practice: Around the World

Leon Fulcher

Kia ora tatau and warm greetings to Child and Youth Care Workers around the world during this first week in May when we celebrate who and what we are as a workforce! Regardless of job titles, ranging from Houseparent to Care Worker to Group Life Counsellor, Youth Worker or even Social Pedagogue, central to our work we are all making connections and engaging in relationships that matter with children, young people, and their family members – and with each other! That is why we celebrate relational child and youth care in daily living and learning activities.

Relational child and youth care involves active participation in *Opportunity Moments* – as they are occurring. This is different from organising an activity to keep everyone engaged during an afternoon or evening free time. Opportunity moments are relational. They are meant to

be shared and enjoyed whenever possible. Some opportunity moments may involve planned use of social skills as a young person uses public transport for the first few times. Engaging in opportunity moments can also be fun and support the development of both personal and social skills longer term. When planning for International Child and Youth Care Week, seek opportunity moments that may include favourite foods or visits to local parks for playful celebrations.

Making Connections happen in a variety of ways. When meeting a young person or family member for the first time, it is good to remember how easy it is easier to create "a bad impression". It can be hard to get beyond negative first impressions that impact on the kind of relationships we develop with children and young people who are still very close to desperate family circumstances or traumas. Making connections are often supported by food, especially personal favourite foods that feature in the weekly menu or prepared for special occasions. Like International Child and Youth Care Week, we can create opportunity moments that strengthen connections, like Birthday Cakes and monthly Special Meals that are planned and prepared together. Making connections does not require extra funding. It is more about engaging in the now and together making something happen. Sometimes, it like following the Nike Motto: *Just Do It!*

Being in Relationship as a Child and Youth Care Worker requires that cultural safety features prominently in our relationships with children or young people, their family members, co-workers, and others. New Zealand Māori have customary practices handed down through elders that include rituals of encounter. Cultural Safety, or *Kawa Whakaruruhau* as it is known in te Reo Māori, are requirements for gaining professional registration to practice in New Zealand for both Nurses and Social Workers. Being in relationship needs to address opportunity moments and practices between men and women after the age of 12 and extend to the foods that are

acceptable for eating and how food is prepared. Clothing also features, as illustrated when care leavers tell of how special it was wearing clothes they chose and purchased with their own allowance while before that, they wore 'hand-me-down' clothes from a residential home storeroom.

Noticing Rhythms is a theme that can be usefully considered during supervision. Here I assert that all who contribute to relational child and youth care practice – anywhere in the world – require opportunities periodically to review their personal performance as a Child or Youth Care Worker, or Supervisor. Critical incidents or crisis events frequently occur in relational child and youth care work because somebody and sometimes everybody failed to Notice that 'something' was up in the relational climate of group living. Noticing personal needs of young people living with others is vitally important. Noticing social needs of small groups of residents can be just as important. Noticing rhythms involves paying attention and for workers who do 12-hour shifts, there is good research about staffing rosters and work-related stress. Relational child and youth care practice is a stressful field of professional or occupational activity. When tired and exhausted toward the end of a 12-hour shift, one's capacity for noticing rhythms is impaired. Maybe start with trying to monitor your own personal wellbeing rhythms. You are who we celebrate!

LEON C. FULCHER, MSW, PhD - International Child & Youth Care Consultant, www.TransformOutcomes.com - *Outcomes that Matter* and CYC-Net Board of Governors member for the Asia-Pacific Region.

Editorial Comment

Reflections on Relational Practice

Thom Garfat

Relational Child & Youth Care practice is now a familiar term in our field and, yet, to this moment, there is no clear definition of what is meant by the term although some, including myself (Garfat, Gaitens, Hadley & Leggett, 2024) have tried to explain what it means to us, individually.

In this issue, which celebrates the theme of this year's CYC Week (Celebrating Relational Child & Youth Care Practice: Around the World) we have called upon members of the Board of Governors of CYC-Net and our regular columnists to speak to some aspect of Relational CYC Practice in their corner of the world.

Because we wanted their voices to be heard as they would speak them, we have, in many ways, dispensed with some of the 'normal' issue editing – thus, for example, writers have used names without references, spoken clearly in the first person and been free to share thoughts without the, sometimes necessary, grounding in the literature. In many ways, this is a reflection of Relational Child & Youth Care Practice – we meet people 'where they are at engaging with them in their world as they live and experience it (see Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi & Fulcher, 2018).

Although there is, as mentioned above, no agreed upon definition, we do seem to agree in our field that one of the distinguishing features of Relational CYC Practice is that it focuses on the characteristics of the relationship itself (the in-between between us (Garfat, 2008) rather than the characteristics of those involved in the relationship. This has important implications regarding power, authority, colonialist approaches to care and other issues, as Kiaras discusses in his paper in this issue. This does not mean that we discount the 'development of a relationship' for, as Ziigwanbinesii Charles says in this issue, the process of connecting "forms a relationship where one can then be relational". As you read the papers in this issue you will realize that underlaying each of them is an inherent assumption about what Relational CYC Practice means to each of the authors – and it is not always the same. This is as it should be in an evolving transition. And so, we invite you, the reader, to reflect on what Relational CYC Practice, as opposed to relationship-based practice, means to you – feel free, please, to share your thoughts on the CYC-Net Discussion group.

And 'happy CYC Week' to you all.

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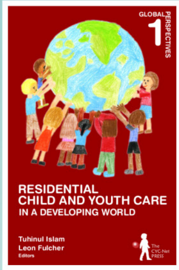

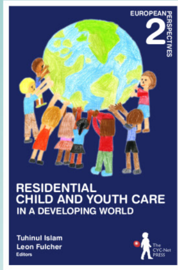

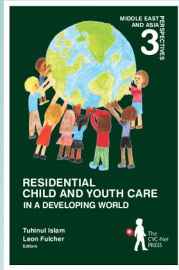

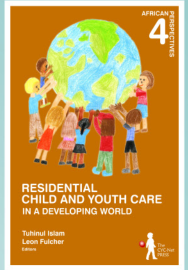

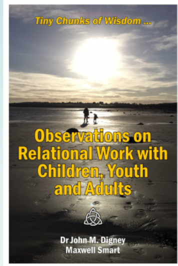

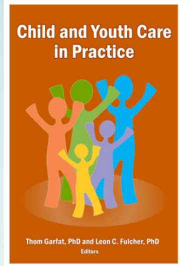

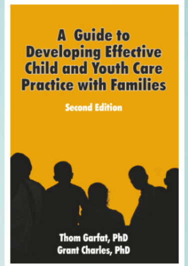

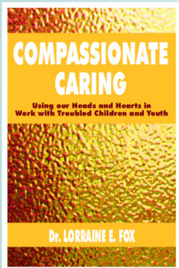

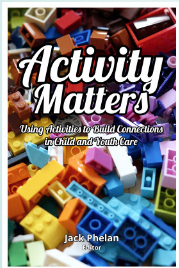

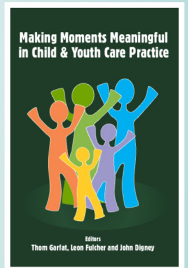

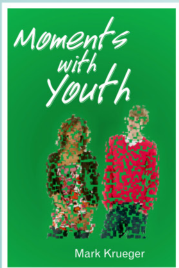

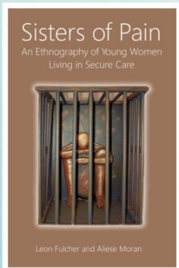

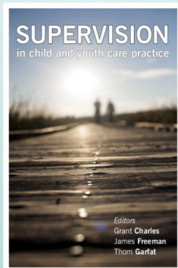

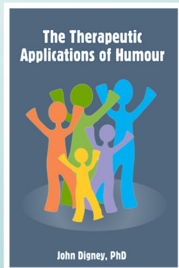

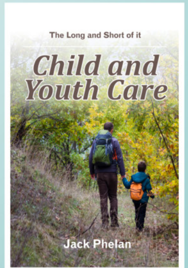

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A Relational Approach to Mentoring Child and Youth Care Practitioners

Werner van der Westhuizen and Thom Garfat

It is suggested that the discipline of mentoring originated from a character in Homer's Odyssey called Mentor. Mentor was actually the goddess Athene in disguise and her role was to accompany the young man Telemachus on a quest to find his father, Odysseus. Although Telemachus was rash and impetuous, he was also full of potential which required the proper channelling in order to manifest positive outcomes for himself and others. Mentor steers Telemachus through his journey of transformation, and he learns about the arts and crafts of enlightened rulership. At the end of the story, he is prepared and empowered to return to Ithaca to replace his father on the throne. 'Telemaque' was first published in France in 1699, and then across Europe with phenomenal success and by 1750, the name Mentor had become a label that one applied to a skilled advisor.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is, first and foremost, a relationship between two people, one of them a person with desirable qualities, knowledge, experience and skills (called a mentor), and another person who is prepared to learn from them (called a mentee).

The mentor offers support and guidance to the mentee to reach their personal and/or professional goals. They are a trusted and experienced advisor who focuses on passing on personalised, domain-specific knowledge and competence through various relationship-focused methods. This process may involve helping to set and clarify goals and objectives and creating a space for reflective learning in which the mentee can grow and experience success. Mentors remain open to learning themselves and realise that they can also learn from the mentee during the life of this relationship.

The mentee takes responsibility for their own learning and role in the relationship by showing initiative and following through on action plans. The mentorship relationship is reciprocal and collaborative in nature. Together the mentor and mentee shape the relationship, sharing knowledge and reaching consensus about the mentee’s desired learning. The learning goals are articulated early in the life of the relationship so that the process can be meaningful and address the specific learning needs of the mentee.

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Approaches to mentoring

Mentoring can follow a formal or informal format. Formal mentoring relationships may be found in organisations where suitable individuals are recruited as mentors as part of a company's talent management strategy and the process may therefore be more structured with clear learning outcomes. Informal mentoring, on the other hand, may develop naturally when a practitioner develops a relationship with someone, inside or outside of the same organisation, who they consider to be a role model and from whom they would like to learn. This may be a less structured form of mentoring and learning objectives may be less defined.

Mentoring models or approaches may be described based on how these relationships develop, the social situation or the structure of the mentoring process. For example, peer mentoring may involve individuals in similar positions while in supervisory mentoring, the mentor occupies a higher position in the organization than the mentee. The nature of the relationship may be more egalitarian and open, or hierarchical and structured. Mentoring is also not exclusively an individual process and may take place in a group format. Various models have been developed to structure the process of mentoring, such as the GROW model (Mind Tools, 2023) and the 5 C's Model (Keele University). The GROW model follows the following key steps in the mentoring process from which the acronym GROW is derived:

- **G**oal
- Current **R**eality
- **O**ptions (or obstacles)
- **W**ill (or way forward).

Similarly, the 5 C's Model is structured within five key areas that provide a map for the mentoring journey, namely:

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- **C**hallenges
- **C**hoices
- **C**onsequences
- **C**reative Solutions
- **C**onclusions.

While each of these descriptions or models of mentoring provide some way to structure the mentoring relationship and process, they do not adequately reflect the unique relational approach of Child and Youth Care practice and its focus on the use of daily life events. A mentoring approach and model that will be effective in guiding and supporting *child & youth care practitioner mentees would need to embrace the same philosophy and processes that are central to Relational Child & Youth Care (CYC) Practice*.

A Child & Youth Care approach to mentoring therefore applies the philosophy and principles of Relational CYC Practice in the mentorship relationship and in particular the following principles are highlighted.

- **Reflective:** The continuous process of thinking about why the practitioner does what they do, the way they do it, before, during and after their encounters with others;
- **Relational:** A focus on the mutuality of the relationship and the meaning that is co-constructed within it;
- **Intentional:** Interactions are purposeful and shaped to support developmental and growth outcomes of the individual;
- **Developmental:** Recognition of the personal and professional developmental growth stages of the individual;
- **Contextual:** The individual in constant dynamic interaction with their environment, influencing and simultaneously being influenced by all other systems;

- **Strengths-based:** An intentional focus on the potential and possibilities of the individual without ignoring the risks and vulnerabilities;
- **Collaborative:** A *doing-together* approach from a position of equality;
- **Embedded in daily life events:** The mentoring relationship does not stand outside of the day-to-day experiences of the mentor and mentee but is embedded in these everyday life events. The mentor is a *guide-on-the-side* in the present moment, as life happens to both participants.

A Relational CYC Approach to Mentoring

When the mentoring style and approach is grounded in Relational CYC Practice principles and methods, the mentoring process and methodology are not different from Relational CYC Practice. Rather, it *is* child and youth care practice applied to the context of practitioner support and development. In particular, the mentor applies the principles of Relational CYC Practice (Garfat et.al., 2018) and a daily life events approach and for this reason this approach is described here as Relational Child & Youth Care (CYC) Mentoring. To demonstrate how Relational CYC Mentoring is grounded in a Relational CYC approach, it is necessary to briefly describe and explore what is meant by Relational CYC Practice.

Relational CYC Practice emphasises the role of the practitioner as being in-the-moment with children and young people, experiencing their lives with them as it unfolds (Winfield, 2008). It is an approach which is inclusive, rights-based, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed. Particular attention is directed towards what Garfat et.al. refer to as “the in-between between us” (2018, p.14), the relationship that forms between the practitioner and the child or young person and the meaning that they attach to the relationship.

Both practitioner and young person contribute to creating the relationship and are shaped by the relationship at the same time (Fewster, 1990). It is from this position that Stuart (2014) then argues that the relationship *is* the intervention.

Relational CYC Practice is a way of being in the world with others in which the focus is on moments of connection and togetherness (Gharabaghi, 2019), which is appropriate as most of our problems in communities are rooted in our disconnection from one another (Freeman, 2021). A relational approach to connecting and caring for others is a step toward building more trauma-responsive communities that support human rights and respect the dignity of every individual (Freeman, 2021). The Relational Child & Youth Care approach is also described through a collection of characteristics that developed from years of experiences and had been influenced by various voices along the way (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi & Fulcher, 2018). The characteristics describe how practitioners can *be with* others as they encounter and interact with them in the everyday moments of life and collectively find meaning in their experiences of the world around them. This approach binds together various professionals who participate in the field of child and youth care practice, such as child and youth care workers, trainers, youth advocates, community development workers, social workers or researchers. Within a relational approach, all of these practitioners are bound together by their shared approach to the work, the way in which they think about and carry out their work. It is "how we are with young people, in all of their diversity and life experiences" (Garfat et al, 2018, p.14).

The mentoring relationship is not merely the result of agreed-upon goals and tasks, but a relational space in which the mentor and mentee co-create and experience moments of connectedness and safety. This relational space is both the result of the expression of the characteristics of Relational

CYC practice as well as a space that encourages the expression of these characteristics. In this relationship, the mentee experiences the power of a Relational CYC approach and is guided by the mentor to also give expression to these experiences in their relational care of children and young people. It is, in essence, about a way of being in the world with others.

CYC mentoring and supervision

Supervision is often a professional and formal process whereby practitioners receive guidance and support from a more experienced and senior practitioner. When working from within a Relational Child and Youth Care philosophy, supervision is grounded in a daily life events approach to reflect the characteristics of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice (Charles, Freeman & Garfat, 2016). Support and guidance that takes place *on-the-go* brings an intentional focus on in-the-moment interactions in the working life-space. It is about being with practitioners in *the everyday,* helping them grow and develop in the context of their practice. The same holds true for mentoring: the process and method of mentoring should reflect the relational philosophy and characteristics of the Child & Youth Care profession. In this way, the practitioner learns about a way of being with others through experiencing that way of being in the mentorship relationship. Garfat (2001), referring to supervision, says that the approach to, and form of, supervision (or in this case mentoring) should model the form and approach of effective practice to help staff learn that approach. The mentoring interactions then provide a parallel and congruent experience of Relational CYC practice which creates an opportunity for experiential learning as opposed to a theoretical discussion.

In addition to the characteristics of Relational Child & Youth Care practice, Charles, Gabor & Matheson (1992, in Charles et.al., 2016) identify positive and negative characteristics of supervisors. For example, positive and desirable characteristics include acceptance, positive role modelling, providing clear explanations of policies, interventions and procedures and giving concrete feedback while undesirable characteristics include a lack of directness, unavailability, negativity and defensiveness. As the mentor embraces these positive characteristics it shapes the relational space, the *in-between between us* and the quality of the mentoring provided. This points to the importance of mentors being highly self-reflective and relational in their focus. It is worthy to note that the positive characteristics of supervisors (as identified above) are closely connected to the characteristics of Relational Child & Youth Care practice, which reinforces the notion that there is a strong relationship between Child & Youth Care practice and supervision (Charles et.al., 2016).

Transferable skills

Many of the skills and competencies of Relational CYC practice can be transferred to supervision and mentoring (Charles, Freeman & Garfat, 2016), for example:

- A strengths-based focus serves to balance collaboration and authority so that goals and solutions can be co-constructed with children and young people. Similarly, acknowledging the strengths of CYC practitioners in collaborative relationships can encourage them to deal with the challenges and struggles and capitalise on their abilities.
- Promoting autonomy helps children and young people to understand the choices they have and to take responsibility for their actions. Within the context of mentoring, promoting autonomy emphasises the CYC practitioner's responsibility for their own learning process and encourages them to take on greater responsibilities as they grow and acquire new skills.
- A focus on making even small moments matter help children and young people who have been invalidated and exploited to learn that they matter. CYC practitioners also need to feel that they are making a difference in the world and that their momentary engagement with children and young people is meaningful.
- Developing a sense of mastery helps children and young people who have never felt control over their lives to develop self-regulation, autonomy and goal setting. Similarly, mentors can help CYC practitioners to understand the process of mastery and to develop their own sense of mastery as their competence grows.

Other transferable skills include being experiential, appreciating uniqueness, being flexible and consistent, acceptance and validation, cultural agility and developmental awareness. The implementation of Child and Youth Care methods and skills within a mentoring relationship further aligns the mentoring approach to the principles of Relational CYC practice and results in an approach to learning and development that is congruent with the principles of practice.

A model for Relational Child & Youth Care mentoring

The model of mentoring suggested below closely follows the Relational CYC philosophy of change articulated by Thom Garfat (2019). This supports a mentoring approach which is aligned and congruent with the principles Relational CYC Practice.

Garfat (2019) articulates this approach from the perspective of the person who might benefit from change:

In the context of a relationship of safety
I notice that I might benefit from a change.
I am supported in taking the risk to try something different
from what I usually do.
Having a positive experience of that new way of doing or being,
this becomes my new way in the world.

Within this philosophy of change, we can discern different components of change and growth from this perspective, extrapolate the themes of each component and distil it down to its core elements.

Garfat's model	Extrapolating meaning or themes	Distilling it down to the core elements
In the context of a relationship of safety	People are unlikely to take risks, especially with regards to relationships, unless they feel safe	Relational safety
I notice that I might benefit from a change	The importance of self-awareness and noticing that there are better ways of doing things	Noticing Awareness Reflection
I am supported	There is support offered, the person is not expected to do it all alone	Support Connection
In taking the risk To try something different from what I usually do	The recognition that change and growth often implies an element of risk, the risk that things may not work out as planned and we may be hurt in the process New behaviours or interactions may require new skills or different attitudes	Risking in the context of safety New behaviours/New way of doing Repetitive trials
Having a positive experience of that new way of doing or being	The importance of having a positive experience to reinforce the new behaviour	Positive experience Working to make that experience positive, even finding the small positives (e.g., strength based) Reframing
This becomes my new way in the world	Repeated positive experiences and successful attempts creates a new habit and new way of doing and being	New way of doing becomes a new way of being Acting on the world

From Garfat's philosophy of change, six main elements of growth and change are identified which can provide the CYC mentor with a structure for the principles of mentoring.

Relationship of safety

The relationship of safety is central to all the other processes that combine to form this relational mentoring model. It is a prerequisite for growth and change and implies that in the absence of a relationship of

safety, positive growth and change is unsupported and unlikely to occur or be sustained. In simple terms, relational safety refers to the experience of feeling safe within a relationship (Garfat, 2015). A trauma-informed perspective supports the relationship of safety as a prerequisite for any other developmental work (Bath, 2008).

Garfat (2015) says the following:

> "When one experiences relational safety, one feels like there is no threat to self, that one can experiment and take risks, that it is OK to be themselves in the context of this relationship" (p.5)

> "Relational safety is central to effective helping interactions and interventions" (p.5)

> "In Relational Child & Youth Care Practice, we focus on the characteristics of the relationship itself - e.g. is it a safe place? Is it a place of connectedness, of learning, etc.?" (p.5)

> "Relational safety is the outcome of the effective use of a Child & Youth Care Approach as identified through the 25 characteristics of Relational Child & Youth Care Practice" (p.5)

> "... a CYC approach in creating relational safety creates a context to address the three pillars of trauma informed care..." (p.5)

The mentor is aware that relational safety is something that is experienced by the mentee - if the mentee does not experience a feeling of safety in the context of this relationship, relational safety has not yet been

established and this remains the primary goal before any other developmental work is attempted.

To be effective in building a relationship of safety with the mentee, the mentor must be able to create environments that can be experienced as safe, for example a relationship (relational space) in which it is safe to take some risk without fear of judgement. The mentor also has to create an awareness of the mutuality of relationships and an awareness that meaning is co-constructed within relational encounters.

Noticing and awareness

An essential element of purposeful development is that we aspire to something different. For this to happen, we must become aware of a gap between our current state and our desired state. This awareness happens through a process of noticing (Garfat, 2019), when we intentionally direct our attention to our internal and external experiences.

Noticing what is happening *in here* refers to an awareness of our own internal thoughts and emotions, including our values, perceptions, biases and physiological responses. Noticing what happens *out there* is our awareness of the other person and everything we can observe about them in the present moment, as well as any other knowledge we have about them (TransformAction International, 2013) and the current context. As we notice the behaviours of others, we may ask what it means within the context of our interaction with them. We might observe their behaviour and physiological responses and reactions in the current moment, which may lead us to speculate that they are, for example, relaxed and calm, or agitated and nervous.

While both the *in here* and *out there* are critical domains of noticing, perhaps the most important focus in Relational CYC practice is what

happens in the *in-between between us*. This is an awareness of the mutually co-created experience which may be of connectedness or disconnection, safety or lack thereof, contained space or chaotic and unpredictable. The mentor strives to co-create, together with the mentee, a relational space of safety which is most conducive for learning and growth.

The awareness that we develop through our intentional noticing of these dimensions allows us to be purposeful in our actions. What we notice informs how we choose our responses; noticing supports intentionality.

As the mentor practises self-awareness and notices aspects of themselves, the mentee and the relationship, they also help the mentee to develop an awareness of these aspects. In the context of the learning and development of the mentee, noticing can help the mentee to become aware of their own learning and development needs. It may draw their attention to various aspects in which they may experience a need for growth, such as personal values, beliefs or child and youth care theories and methods. Self-awareness allows the mentee to notice where they might benefit from change and further development so that these areas for growth can be further supported.

Support and connection

The mentee is supported in taking the risk to try something new. This might involve implementing a new understanding of theory or new techniques or methods; it might be a different way to try to connect with a young person or it may be a new way of thinking about the relationship between the mentee and the young person.

The support provided by the mentor can take many forms, such as providing encouragement or information; even criticism can be supportive when it is constructive. Support may even be intentional silence in a moment when the mentee can answer their own question to be empowered

from within. Support is what the mentee needs to help them understand themselves and others in their situation and what they need to do to strengthen relational safety and provide connectedness. Support helps them understand the needs of those they work with (as well as their own needs) and how to help those individuals meet their needs in healthy ways. Support helps the mentee to navigate the difficult terrain of relationships.

Risking something new

Risking means moving beyond our comfort zone. Taking a risk to try something new can be daunting and scary, but individuals are much more likely to risk something new if they are supported. The mentee risks failure and also getting hurt in the process; even the experienced CYC practitioner risks rejection when they reach out to a young person and regardless of one's training, it is not always easy to put away one's personal feelings to be "objective and professional". In fact, authentic connection and engagement requires personal investment and with that, taking a real interpersonal risk. The mentor helps the mentee understand their apprehension towards taking these kinds of risks and help them to identify risks that are healthy, intentional and purposeful from which they can grow.

Positive experiences

When we have a positive experience of something new, we are more likely to repeat the actions that lead to the experience. Positive experiences do not mean that every attempt is always successful, but even when we miss the mark we can still have a positive experience, if we are well supported. A positive experience can mean that we experience ourselves in a positive new way, perhaps as more confident and more intentional, regardless of whether our actions resulted in the intended outcome.

Mentors help provide positive experiences by *helping mentees notice the progress they make,* even if in small parts, by providing encouragement. Even when things go wrong, the process of reflecting on the experience can be positive and empowering when mentees uncover what they can do better next time and feel acknowledged for their efforts and intentions. *The mentor helps the mentee to reframe what may initially be perceived as negative experiences into opportunities for growth and learning.*

New way of doing becomes a new way of being

Behaviours repeated successfully and with positive results become habits, so that what we do to relate to others in more authentic and engaging ways can become our everyday way of being in all our interactions, in our daily lives wherever we go. The mentee integrates reflective practices into their everyday encounters as they become more intentional and relational in their interactions with those around them. The mentor celebrates these new ways of being with the mentee.

Conclusion

In any profession, learning and development can be supported by a mentor who can provide guidance and support in the practical matters concerning the everyday practice of the profession. In CYC practice, this is even more important since the nature of the tasks and daily challenges are dynamic and ever changing. While there are a number of mentoring models developed to provide structure to a mentoring process and relationship, the Relational CYC practitioner has a very specific *way of being* in relation to others. The mentoring process should be congruent with and support this mode of encounter with others. When mentoring is aligned to the principles and practice of Relational Child & Youth Care, it provides the practitioner with an experience of what relational encounters feel like and this first hand experience further strengthens their ability to implement these principles in their practice.

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Source: *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice, 36/2*, pp6-21

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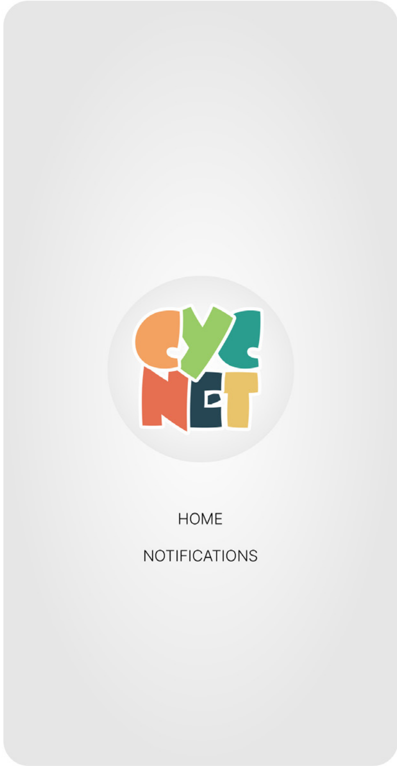

Celebrating Relational Practice: Across the Globe

Ziigwanbinesii Charles

As a forever learner in the field of Child and Youth Care, relational practice to me has revealed itself to be all about connection. On paper *connection* does not seem that complicated, however in reality *how* we connect with people is individualized and unique. Depending on a person's life journey, experiences, culture, religious beliefs, values, geography, family dynamics, identity, and a variety of other factors, this can cause connecting to not be '*so simple.*' For those reasons, everyone's story is different. Being relational is about starting a relationship. When we take time to slow down and be curious of one another we begin the process of connecting which forms a relationship where one can then be relational. Remember if being relational was easy all relationships would be relational – how's that for cryptic.

In my experience as a child and youth care practitioner, I have worked alongside children, youth and young adults who are identified to be *'at risk'* often by the systems that have strategically placed them there. Often, *time* is of the essence as you never know how long you will share space with a client. Typically, I have found that working with a client's needs has helped

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to inform safety and build trust quickly which then opens the door for connection.

For example, when I have a client who has run away from home or a placement and is dysregulated, once they are found I know to offer food, drink, a comfy space, and a listening ear. As we work together (client and practitioner) to become regulated it is my job to guide a realistic step by step plan that can be achieved *together. The goal is* to get this young person to place of safety with their input ensuring their unique and valid needs are met*.* This supportive approach in a person's moment of need establishes trust, care, safety and feeling that they matter to someone. Connecting a client to community supports to avoid further hopelessness, helplessness and isolation can show care at a deeper level. Investing in our clients is a vital step in beginning a reciprocal relationship. As a child and youth care practitioner helping someone stabilize, get grounded, a place to belong, find a circle of care and support to thrive can be the difference between hope and ruin.

Advice

I remember when I was in Ireland in 2015 for the *'Unity Through Relationship'* Conference, I was introduced to James Anglin after dinner. He was very curious about who I was and how I was doing in the field of child and youth care. One of the beautiful benefits to be able to attend conferences is meeting people you normal wouldn't run into who you can *talk shop* with. We started sharing stories of practice and James gave some advice which I share to this day with CYC's who are studying, graduating or new in the field. He said, "Ensure you have a method or model that informs your practice. You want to make sure the model you follow is based on your values and something you can easily translate to clients you are working

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with; you need to believe in it for it to work. If you cannot find one, create one." I'm not sure if James remembers me or that conversation but it was pivotal and lives on. An important part of this conversation was to have relational models that highlight the benefits of how strength-based interactions create healing, restoration and support an individual to flourish.

Models in Child and Youth Care

This is where two very important models of Child and Youth Care come into play in my personal practice. The first being The Circle of Courage Model by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern. The text, **Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Futures of Promise** is one I review regularly. The Circle of Courage Model is based on key concepts from First Nation's Pedagogy that are identified into four areas: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. As a child and youth care worker who is also First Nation's this model resonates and is effective in my daily practice with the individuals I walk alongside. When people who are accessing a care service are represented in the models used the service user is supported tenfold because the translation of the model is understood because it correlates to their life experience. Again, this model shows how significant it is for cultures who have typically been silenced and segregated to have space, a voice, and a platform. It is important to note that not all First Nation's cultures are the same and it is imperative to be flexible, open to learning and adaptable to find the best fit for the individual.

The second is the 25 Characteristics of Child and Youth Care. As stated in ***Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach Revisited*** by Thom Garfat, James Freeman, Kiaras Gharabaghi and Leon Fulcher, "Relational Child and Youth Care is articulated through twenty-five characteristics which are organized in a three-part framework of ways of *being, interpreting, and doing*. These characteristics seek to express Child

and Youth Care practice in the life-space and in the moment of interaction between the practitioner and the young person, family, or community. It includes a focus on inclusive practice related to culture, race, trauma, and other historic contexts important to the Child and Youth Care field.”

Being taught both approaches early on in my career influenced the importance of connection in the most genius and simple ways. Together these approaches emphasise the impact of human-to-human connection, recognizing as a child and youth care worker that our purpose is to care and to assist in meeting the needs of those who are vulnerable and would benefit from our guided support. It’s in each moment whether big or small we have the ability to influence and that should not be taken lightly.

Building capacity to understanding relational practice

Being in this field for a little while now working with young people, I would love to say that everyone is strength based, client centred, and relational. However, in my practice I am actively disrupting a *deficit-based world* of care, to me this is ironic. I have sat in spaces where young people are called things such as bossy, defiant, attention seeking, oppositional, dramatic, impulsive, rebellious, or challenging, and even worse labels. I remember being in a meeting where the community support workers were caught up in what’s wrong with a client. I paused the meeting and reframed the conversation. I then asked them to give me some strengths or things they admired about the client. There were quite a long silence and people were perplexed. I summarized strengths and qualities I heard during the meeting. I could see this was quite challenging to hear for the service providers as they were used to only thinking one way which was deficit based. I use this example because we must be careful of the limitations we as professionals set on the clients we are working with. I decided to offer a

moment in time to speak for all parts of this person not just "what is the inconvenience to the professionals." We must let go of our own wants and needs to best serve the individual and where they are at. If I believed what the adults in the education system said about me, personally I would not be where I am today. I work everyday to unlearn what I was taught to believe about myself. We must acknowledge the good, special and uniqueness found in each person.

In the spirit of celebrating relational practice, I would like to highlight you, the reader. Thank you for taking time to educate yourself, participate in professional development, advocate, disrupt current systems and people who make relational practice seem unimportant. It takes constant energy to stand up for and show by example what relational practice truly encompasses. It is in your daily questioning, use of voice, education to peers and respectful disruption that relational practice becomes the norm of what is acceptable when working with young people.

I know you are out there. Continue to shine and do heart work.

Love, Ziigwanbinesii Charles.

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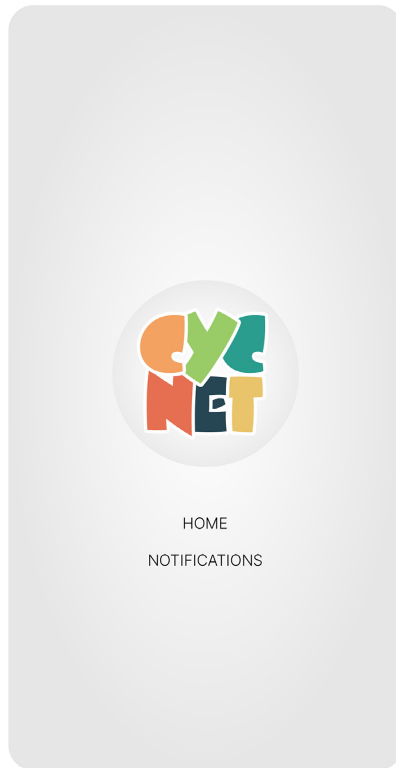

The Challenges of Relational Practice

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Although it is a complex concept, relational practice, simply put, is a practice that focuses on the relationship rather than the parties to the relationship. Garfat talked about the 'space in-between', as a way of distinguishing relationship-based practices, which focus on the parties to the relationship as interacting entities on the one hand (interpersonal practice), and relational practices that are located outside of those parties and their interactions in a space that is fluid and constantly evolving and into which the parties to the relationship may reach and collide or converge. This conceptualization has both theoretical and practice consequences. On the theoretical end of things, it locates child and youth care practice in a third space that is owned neither by the practitioner nor by the young person. In this way, that third space is a much more democratic space, even a decolonized space inasmuch as it disconnects ownership of how we are together from ourselves as autonomous beings. Within that third space, we exist in interdependence and rely on each other for how we are going to be together. It is a powerful way of thinking about our work differently than what is embedded in the decades of transactional, interpersonal, and power-laden narrative of relationships we 'have'.

From a practice perspective, the relational space allows for much different practices than what was generated through relationship-focused

spaces. It allows for what Bellefeuille and others refer to as relational inquiry, a way of being together that focuses not on how we behave toward one another or toward others, but instead of how we might understand and make meaning of our being together. In other words, it renders the practice reflective not merely for the practitioner but also for the young person. In so doing, we are tempted to understand relational practices as somehow soft practices, or practices that fail to achieve an outcome such as behavioural change or a better attitude. In fact, our commitment to relational practices is often quite limited or at least contingent. By that I mean that we are quick to abandon, or at least suspend, relational practice in order to impose purposeful change regiments, be that through old fashioned rewards and consequence approaches, point and level systems, token economies, or through slightly more updated evidence-based practices such as dialectical behavioural therapy, stop now and plan, or collaborative problem solving.

In fact, relational practices are anything but soft. There are times when such practices are outright brutal in what they demand of both practitioner and – even more so – young people. To ask anyone, but especially a teenager or someone even younger, to step outside of themselves and see – and be – in a fluid space beyond one's full control, is a major ask for which neither practitioner nor young person are particularly well equipped. For one thing, the employment context of practitioners rarely allows for such approach. There are just too many expectations to move the young person, to change the young person, or to get the young person to do something they don't want to do. Employers are looking for action with measurable and immediate impact. For the young person, who often has experienced nothing but grief when allowing themselves to go beyond their own material and physical manifestation, this comes with a demand for faith and confidence in systems and service contexts, as well as in persons, who have more often than not failed to come through. Beyond the employment

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context of practitioners, the space in-between us is transient and momentary, and making meaning of that space requires both reflection and analysis, and it requires both these things simultaneously. First, the young person must sense that space, then observe it, then navigate within it, and then analyze its meaning and respond to the outcome of that analysis. For most young people, the process stops at reflection, which is developmentally well outside of the norm for most teenagers. For neurodiverse young people it is an even greater task to perform all these functions simultaneously and in the right sequence. It seems almost absurd to expect them to do this. For racialized young people, the analysis inevitably requires a contextualization of much broader and much deeper issues and dynamics that are societal in nature but experienced in very intimate and personal ways, and usually in ways that are difficult and rightfully solicit resistance. The same might be said for young people identifying outside of binary gender constructions.

We may have made excellent progress on thinking about relational practices and refining what we mean by that, but for the most part, I very much doubt there are all that many relational practices to be found in service systems. Very often, we continue to be steeped in relationship-based practices, speak to 'having' relationships with young people, and sometimes labelling young people as an outcome of problems within those relationships. The question is: Can we move from this position where relationships continue to be commodified and understood as property?

One way of doing that is to move beyond the interpersonal context of relational practices. All too often, such practices are visualized or imagined as interactional ways of being between practitioner and young person (usually one young person as opposed to a group of young people). In fact, the practice literature is replete with examples of this and presents us with scenarios where one specific child and youth care practitioner is dealing

with one specific young person, sometimes in the context of group-based settings and at other times in the context of case-based work contexts where one-on-one work is common. Is it possible to extend the concept of relational beyond that interpersonal context? Can relational practices be applied across structures, systems, and institutions while maintaining its necessary presence with individual young people and perhaps also groups of young people?

One way of doing this is to engage systems and institutions in the same ways we engage young people using relational approaches. This means on the one hand moving beyond the interpersonal context of child and youth care practice, while on the other hand avoiding the often-promoted approach of prioritizing systemic changes to interpersonal engagement. To some extent, this has strong parallels to what Jennifer White referred to as praxis nearly 20 years ago, but it sets the idea of praxis firmly under the umbrella of a relational practice. Specifically, much like relational practice in an interpersonal context does not focus on the parties to the relationship, relational practice in the systems context ought to look past the transactional aspects of institutional engagement and instead focus on the relationship in the fluid and largely unstructured spaces of how we are in relational to institutions, structure, and systems. Along with young people, their families, and their communities, child and youth care practitioners work to develop understanding and make meaning of how we are in our shared being with the systems and institution while inviting those systems and institutions to become present in spaces outside of their immediate control. In many respects, institutions (such as schools, for example), maintain precisely the same level of control and ownership (in neo-colonial style) over young people and their families as relationship-based practitioners do in the context of asserting ownership and commodifying their being with young people. For this reason, creating third spaces that

promote a high level of interdependence both for individuals and for institutions create new opportunities for how we are in relation to the systemic contexts around us while at the same time continuing to be experienced through our interpersonal ways of being with young people.

In the end, relational practices, when engaged with the challenge of moving in those precarious spaces that are neither interpersonal at the exclusion of the systemic nor systemic at the exclusion of the interpersonal, provide an opportunity to avoid a frequently observed patterns of marginalizing young people and their needs or desires because as practitioners, we are excited to challenge institutions and systems; and similarly, it avoids the temptation to pretend that we can make meaning relationally with young people through our direct and one-on-one interactions when we ignore the much broader and deeply embedded structures and systems that shape and sometimes define the way we are together.

Relational practices are a conceptual framework that holds enormous value and potential for practice as well as for theoretical development within the field of child and youth care. But like so many other great concepts, we are prone to simplify this one, consider it interchangeable with predecessor concepts such as relationship-based practice. This special issue of *CYC-Online* is designed as a celebration of relational practices, which is wonderful. It should also serve to move this framework forward by critically engaging its challenges and possibilities.

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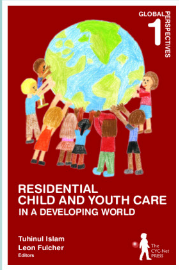
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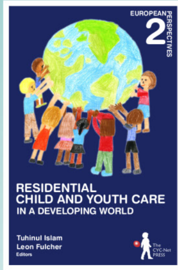
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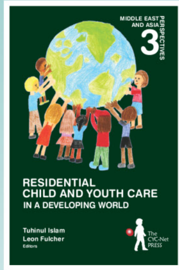
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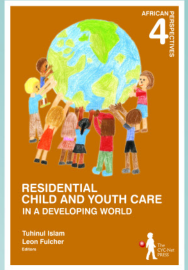
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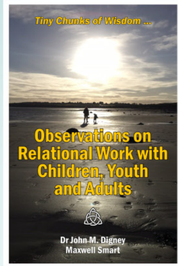
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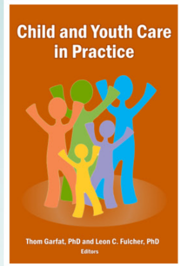
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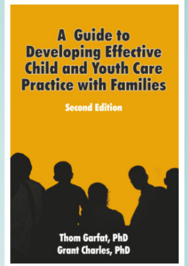
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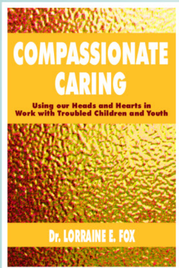
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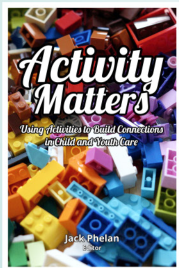
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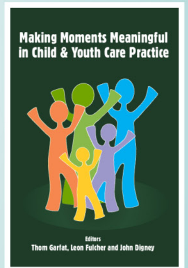
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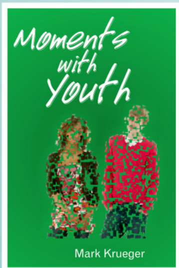
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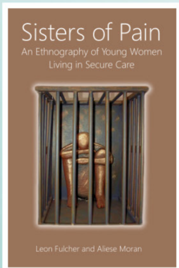
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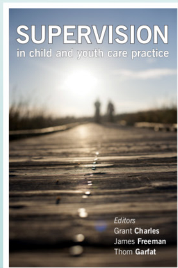
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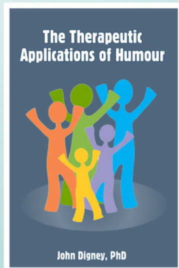
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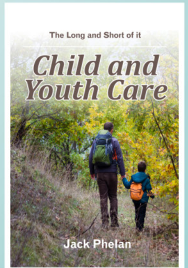
The Long and Short of it
Child and Youth Care
Jack Phelan

CYC-Net PRESS

Learning Relational Child and Youth Care Practice

Heather Modlin

In 1994 I attended my first National Child and Youth Care Conference in Edmonton, Alberta. At that time, I was supervising a group home for 5 boys. I had been in this job for almost 2 years, and I was struggling.

I had a good idea of what child and youth care practice could look like, based on all the books and articles I had read by Mark Krueger, Larry Brendtro, Henry Maier, Leon Fulcher, Gerry Fewster, Lorraine Fox, Thom Garfat – the people who were writing about child and youth care at that time. But what I was reading and what I was experiencing were not the same. In my interpretation of the texts, young people in group care should be engaging harmoniously with the staff in activities and household responsibilities, collaborating on the acquisition of their goals, participating in group discussions and working through problems together in a "positive peer culture" (Brendtro & Vorrath, 1985). Group care was a bubbling cauldron of opportunity, limited only by the creativity and ingenuity of the staff team.

In my reality, objects were flying across the house, fists were going through walls, the contents of the fridge were emptied onto the kitchen floor at an alarming rate, and "f--k off" was the most common method of greeting.

Within the staff team of our group home, there was a split. Half the team was focused on building relationships, ignoring many of the behaviours and trying to attend to the underlying needs (without really having the skills or experience to do this) and the other half was adamant that there needed to be more consequences for the behaviours (which translated into greater punishment).Our program model at the time was a "points and level system" which had generally eroded to staff standing over young people with a clipboard ticking off points while young people retorted with: f—k, f—k, f---k, f—k, f—k, f—k, f—k....how many points is that?"

The focus of most of our staff meetings was swearing and how to deal with it.

I went to the conference in Edmonton on a quest to learn the answer to this most important question: "What do you do when the kids swear?" I accosted everyone I met, and one clear answer emerged: "It depends."

That was not helpful in the moment. Throughout the course of the conference, however, I began to realize that I had been looking for something that did not exist – simple answers to complex problems. And I had been asking the wrong question.

Becoming a relational child and youth care practitioner

Relational child and youth care practice is challenging and complicated. At the beginning it can seem like other practitioners know a secret that you don't have access to. In a way, they do. Confident and experienced practitioners work with different young people than do new and/or scared practitioners. When practitioners are in control of their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and believe that they can manage any situations that arise, they create an atmosphere of safety that helps young people to regulate their own feelings. When practitioners are fearful, avoid

challenging situations, and (inadvertently) relinquish control of their thoughts and emotions to the young people, no one feels safe, and chaos can ensue.

In child and youth care practice, the only way to become competent is to plunge headfirst into the abyss. Hesitating on the sidelines and waiting for it to get easier is a guaranteed way to stand still. The work gets easier after you become comfortable wading through the hard stuff.

Where to begin?

The first step to becoming competent is developing the capacity to set boundaries and limits. When you show up at work, you need to appear cool and confident, even if you are quivering inside. You must deal decisively with situations that require immediate intervention. Uncertainty, waffling or, alternatively, being overly controlling, will make the situation worse.

If you don't know how to set limits, if your own boundaries are not well developed, seek help from your colleagues and supervisor. If your boundaries are too closed and you are too authoritarian, you will need help as well. This is not a step you can skip over. Healthy boundaries are the foundation of a healthy relationship. Boundaries and limits are necessary for establishing safety and trust.

Do you even like young people?

Someone once told me that our young people don't need adults who are trying to save them (that does not tend to work out very well anyway), they need adults who genuinely like children and youth and want to spend time with them. This is the first step of relational practice. Go to work excited about what the day will bring, eager to connect with the young people and

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engage in exciting activities. Delight in their misadventures and look for the humor in the stressful situations. Find joy in the chaos!

What happens on your shift is influenced by what you are thinking before you even walk through the door to your program.

Hanging in

If you are finding the work hard, it will get better. But that only happens when we actively work on helping ourselves become better. Our young people grow – or stay stuck – right alongside us. It is possible for group care to look like it does in the books – but that takes time, effort, knowledge, skill and patience.

There are no quick fixes to healing developmental trauma, or remediating the pain caused by relational injuries.

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Connection and Relational Practice

Simon Walsh

Relational Practice is a term commonly used in the child and youth care space and holds much importance for the work we do with children, young people and families. However, it is a term that means something different for each person. When I think of relational practice, I think of connecting with people, valuing them as a person, and developing a relationship that creates a foundation for therapeutic work and healing.

As a leader of a large child and youth care organisation in Australia, the value of relational practice in my work can't be underestimated. If we can't connect with the people we support, and help them feel valued as an individual, and respected, there is no substance behind the care we provide. It is easy to tick the boxes and meet legislative and regulatory requirements, but what value do these things have for the person we are caring for?

Connection allows us to see the person inside, to understand and accept them, and move forward with healing. Connection allows for a relationship to be developed, and these can often be lasting long beyond the time spent in care. True relational practice will allow for trust and mutual respect to grow.

Being involved with CYC-Net has allowed me to connect with leaders across the world, and understand what relational practice means for them,

and in the countries where they provide care and support. I have been able to see that relational practice has its roots in kids, their families, and the community they live in, and we are united in a common goal to look past the initial challenges, to find and connect with the person we are developing a relationship with. From my corner of the world, it is clear that 'people change people', and relationships are at the centre of the love and care we deliver in our programs each and every day.

When I reflect on my journey the things that impact me most are the memories I have of families and children and the relationship we had, and how those relationships were built from connection. This work cannot be underestimated and is at the heart of any models of care we provide.

The theme of this year's Child and Youth Care Week is *Relational CYC Practice: Across the World*. It provides us with a reminder to focus on what matters for kids, their families and our community and what is needed for these people to thrive. It is easy to miss, or even forget, the foundations of good child and youth care practice when we are caught up in systems, politics and busy work. Child and Youth Care Week is a time for us to reflect on how we can apply relational practice to our work, and how we can ensure our engagements reflect this approach.

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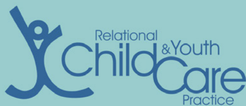

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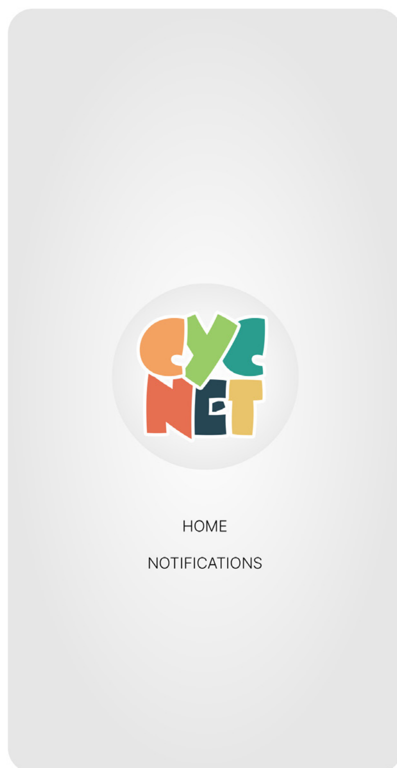

Deep Relational Care

Hans Skott-Myhre

While I applaud the theme of this month's journal, I would like to pause for a moment before celebrating, to wonder exactly what constitutes relational practice in the 21st century? I certainly support any effort to increase our capacity to act in relation as a basic premise of practice. I have written quite a lot about the need for relational care and the necessity of having a fundamental understanding of the ways in which we are all connected to each other in the work that we do.

However, I have also cautioned about understanding relational practice too narrowly. I have proposed that understanding relational practice as defined as a relationship between two human beings within the limited confines of an institutional setting, as both inadequate and misleading. None of us lives in a world in which our relationships are composed of only two participants and having those participants be only humans. We have always been engaged at every level of our being in a pattern that connects us in a web of relations well beyond the limitations of humanity alone, that are profoundly influential in how we are composed at every level of our being.

Of course, we can and do ignore this in our work and can come to see what we do as limited to a worker and a young person in relation to one another within the relational coordinates of an institution such as a family, a community, or a school. Many of us have been taught that this is what a

relationship is, an interaction in which we form connection to one another in ways that we hope will be helpful or possibly even transformative.

In some models of relational care, it is explicit that the relationship is between a caregiver and a care recipient. That the goal is to sustain a meaningful relationship between these two parties. A successful relationship is one in which the care that is given creates well-being in the physical, emotional, social, and psychological aspects of the care recipient's lived experience. The tools to meet this goal often include the use of building trust, utilizing compassion, and empathy. The work is person centered and seeks to center the unique needs, preferences and values of the care recipient. The ability to use effective open and honest dialogue in developing respect and clarity is fundamental to effective relational care. The worker should be reliable and consistent and provide companionship and a sense of belonging. This should all be done collaboratively and with a goal of empowering the care recipient. Finally, if this all works, both the worker and the care recipient can share in mutual growth and transformation.

These are laudable goals for practice and if they were to be actualized in any meaningful way in CYC practice across the globe we would all be better for it. However, I worry that to describe relational practice in this way makes it appear as though relational practice can be done within any context and between any set of care givers and care recipients. In my own thinking about relational care and its associate practices, there are three contextual elements that need be accounted for if we are truly serious about what might be called deep care in the same way that Arne Naess talks about deep ecology.

These elements would include, understanding the historical context in which the work is taking place, understanding the politics of a given historical period, and lastly understanding the kind of social subjects being

produced by the social forces of the society in which the care is taking place. Of course, one can certainly do the work without this kind of in-depth analysis, but I would argue that such work will lack the transformative power necessary, if our field is going to be able to contribute to shaping a generation that can care enough about all our relations to avoid the ongoing brutality and suicidal impulses of our current system of human society.

In that sense, relational care is a fundamentally ontological project that goes well beyond simple life enhancement and maintenance of any particular life. Instead, it becomes a question of who we are to become as a component of a web of profoundly interconnected living systems. It is a question of producing ourselves ontologically as beings capable of working relationally to care for life itself.

To begin to think about our relational practice as a form of deep ecology, requires that we understand the necessity of learning to care for each other as human beings, but also for all our interspecies relations that we rely on for our sustenance and very existence.

While the escalating ecological crisis of the 21st century can seem as though it is so large and global in scale as to be somewhat irrelevant to the day-to-day functioning of relational practice in CYC institutions, it is precisely at the level of micro-politics that we learn how to care for life.

It is in the way we treat each other at the most mundane level that we set the template for how we will care as a society and a species. The capacity for care is what shapes the parameters of society and culture in terms of the ability to live in harmony or strife. When a society is founded on the lived experience of care at the day-to-day level, it is much easier to live in harmony with each other. When a society is built on a lived experience of indifference or even emotional or physical domination through various forms of violence on a day-to-day basis, there will be strife and trauma.

The ways in which the system of value is determined and reinforced in the daily lives of all of us is what determines the characteristics of a historical period. While the question of value in a given historical moment may also seem a bit abstract, what we value or care about as a collective is built moment by moment by acts that demonstrate what is important to us. The broad parameters of history are set into motion at the micro level as billions of interactions that added together set a template for how we will treat ourselves and the world around us.

In our current era, the relational characteristics of collective care appear to me to be highly ambivalent and riddled with struggles for dominance and control. The historical zeitgeist is one of uncertainty, fear, trauma, and massive violence that is manifested in relational coordinates of alienation and dislocation. To imagine that we can ignore this historical context in developing practices of relational care is a kind of willful blindness.

That said, does it matter if we practice care on a micro level between a worker and a young person? Without a doubt, by the logic I have just described millions of such interactions could begin to shift our social coordinates interaction by interaction. However, the capacity to do the kind of deep relational work that can recalibrate our social identities sufficiently to change the historical trajectory of the 21st century is extraordinarily challenging to say the least. To work in deep relational care requires that we reconfigure ourselves as people who live outside history. That is to say, that we would work to become social subjects that live in an alternative future now. This would mean finding a way through our training as alienated and traumatized people who function out of fear. Instead, we need to find ways that allow us to build new forms of relationship to the world around us premised in the fearless capacity for care.

This is particularly difficult, because the systems in which we are embedded from birth on are saturated with hierarchical power dynamics

that confuse narcissistic desires for control and domination with acts of care. This is perhaps most obvious at the micro level in the relationships between those designated as adults and those designated as children. In our contemporary society those care givers often referred to as parents or parental figures are trained in the fine art of asserting dominance and control as acts of protection or even love. This can range from very subtle forms of emotional manipulation to the outright violence of corporal punishment. The justification for this hierarchical imposition of adult force is rooted in notions of human development that would have us view young people as developmentally inferior to adults and in need of control and shaping. This hierarchical orientation that produces us as seeking to be superior to others, is embedded in our social unconscious like a virus that spreads across the social with sometimes deadly symptoms and other times simply understated feelings of unease and dissatisfaction.

There are those who would say that the struggle for domination and control through the assertion of hierarchical imperatives is human nature. Such an argument would propose that such innate human inclinations can be moderated but will always persist. We can strive inspirationally to act more equitably but that is probably the best we can do. Our relationships will always have some element of aggression and a need for control.

While we can certainly see that struggle in the living practices of CYC workers, there are too many exceptions to the rule for dominance and control be human nature. While there are certainly many rule-bound, hierarchical program that use staff authority to manage and control young people, there are also programs and individual workers who center their work on principles of equity and harmony. In many cases, this is not a struggle against an inherent sense of immutable determinism. Instead, it is an affirmation of a radically different sense of difference that arises out of a sense of interconnectedness that operates outside the dominant logic of

our current social norms. Such work is every bit as much an indication of human capacity as the dominant cultural logic of our contemporary social system of brutality and hierarchical violence.

Arne Naess, when speaking about the ecological prospects for the planet stated that he was a short-term pessimist and a long-term optimist. He believed that in the short-term we humans would continue to make a mess of our relationships with the planet and all living things on it. But he believed that there was a failsafe built into human thought which would cause us to realize that what we are doing is fatally flawed. He thought that it was inevitable that we would come to our senses and recalibrate our social organization in such a way as to be sustainable for all living things including ourselves. This shift could take centuries and in the interim, there could be quite a lot of damage and loss of life. But he believed, as a long-term optimist, we would come to our senses in time to build a functional and sustainable future.

I feel very similarly about the field of CYC and our prospects for building relational practices of deep care. For the immediate future, I worry that our attempts at relational care will be compromised by the toxic frameworks of our current system of dominance and control. Escaping the dominant logic of our age is challenging to say the least. But to ignore or minimize the effects our way of life has on the very capacity to form deep relationships of care seriously compromises the force that relational practice offers. It is no mistake that the current system does all it can to keep us at odds, alienated from each other, lonely, and at least slightly desperate. It is to the advantage of any system of domination and control to sustain a sense of incoherence and fragmentation. We are far easier to control alone and lonely.

Under such conditions, we must be careful that within the existing systems capacity for producing fake versions of pretty much everything, we

don't fall for a simulated version of relational practice as well. A version of relational care that skates along the surface of relational possibility and gets used to the ends of assimilation into the system itself rather than building living relationships between all of us. We must beware practices that refuse the depth and complexity that characterizes life itself rather than a simulation of life. Which is why, at the end of day, I can't yet celebrate Relational Practice. For me, there is far too much work to be done. Like Naess, I remain a short-term pessimist and long-term optimist. I believe we can do it, but we have a long way to go.

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Being in Care: A Relational Appreciation

Martin Stabrey

What we today understand from Child and Youth Care literature as being a “relational” approach to looking after children in care is a relatively contemporary phenomenon in the field. Yes, there have been some who have been writing about the foundational characteristics, concepts and elements of “relational” practice for many decades (Gerry Fewster, Thom Garfat, Grant Charles, Brian Gannon and Carol Stuart come to mind). Yet, it is only since the turn of the millennium that these foundations have coalesced into what we today understand as a “relational approach” to working with children and youth in care. Here is a little story about relational practice from a long time ago.

I was in residential care nearly fifty years ago. We were 64 boys (aged 7-18), cared for by a professional staff of 10. On the face of it, not an ideal situation for anything vaguely relational (never mind therapeutic). Right? In my first two years in care, I would go home during the four school vacations each year. And then, in year three, while preparing to go home for the first time that year, I was told by my houseparent’s that I would not be going home as I usually did. My father had disappeared and couldn’t be located. (I was quietly relieved. Going home for the holidays used to be fun. But it wasn’t anymore.)

Only a small number of boys, usually between 5 and 10, stayed behind during the holidays. When I heard that I wouldn't be going home, my first thought was what I was going to do to occupy my time for three weeks with so few of my regular friends around.

Day 2, and I was already bored. After breakfast, the principal, Brian Gannon, asked me what I had planned for the rest of the holidays. I wasn't exactly sure. He told me that a piano was being delivered sometime during the day – a "baby grand" (whatever that was). It had been donated from a cruise ship docked in Cape Town harbour and like all pianos on cruise ships, it had been painted baby blue. (Why?) Brian said that he would be spending the holiday restoring the piano to its original unpainted wood, and if I was at a loose end, I could help him. I said I'd think about it. Truth be told, it was really the last thing I wanted to do. Better to be bored than hang out with an adult for three weeks scraping and sanding a piano.

Two days passed and I realised that doing piano duty was really my only option for filling the vacation days. So, on the Wednesday morning I reported for duty in the front lounge of the Brian's house. (I'd never been inside the principal's house before.) He was already busy, heat gun in hand, stripping paint around the keys. He greeted me, showed me how to brush on paint stripper and how not to sandpaper across the wood grain. There was a bit of small talk in between me admiring my paint removal skills and wondering why and how I was allowed to share his space in his home – without that feeling that I was intruding - or just getting in the way of adult business. And so, for next 19 days we worked from 9-5, returning that piano to showroom condition. Looking at it, in all its glory, I remember such an amazing feeling of achievement. (I still carry a picture of it in my mind.) It was only much later in life that I truly understood what those three weeks of relational connection had meant to me as an adult.

Relational Child and Youth Care practice is an approach in which attention is directed towards ‘the in-between between us’ (Garfat, 2008). “Without a focus on the in-between between us, there is no relational practice” (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi and Fulcher, 2018). Relational practice is not about relationship. Relational practice is about being in the moment with someone. As Gharabaghi noted: “... relational practice shifts the focus from the actors engaged in some form of interaction to the experience of interacting regardless of the specific actors” (Gharabaghi, 2014, p. 8).

It was nearly half a century ago that I cleaned that piano with Brian. Yet, the very basis and essence of what we today understand as relational practice - daily life events, meaningful moments, hanging out, hanging in, intentionality, rhythmicity, being emotionally present, and yes, the purposeful use of activities were already hard at work with the 9 year-old-me back then – and continues nearly 50 years later. Thank you, Brian, for your commitment, your vision, and for “hanging-out” and “hanging-in” with me.

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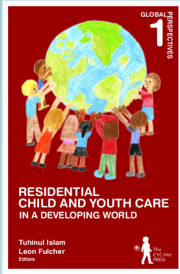

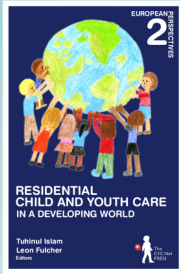

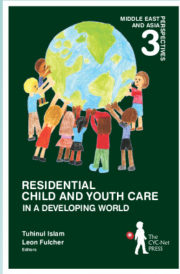

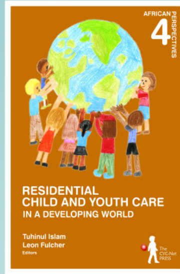

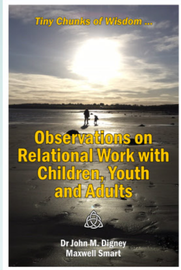

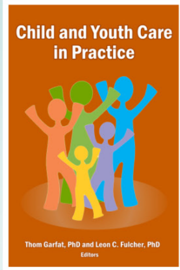

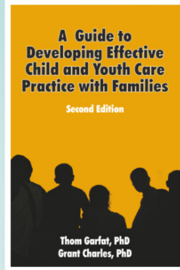

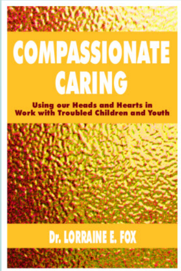

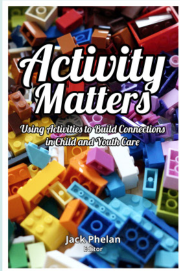

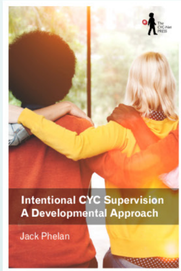

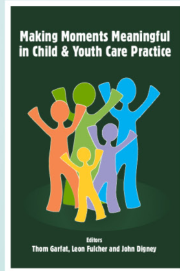

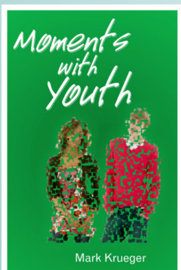

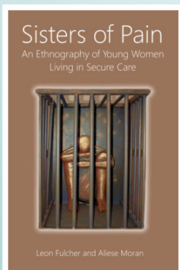

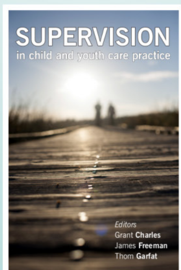

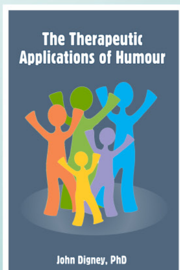

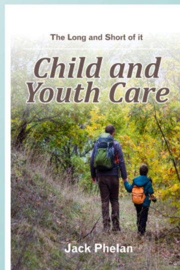

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“Navigating the Path from Vulnerability to Empowerment: A Unified Call to Action”

Kiran Modi

Introduction

In the intricate mosaic of our childhood recollections, the vivid colours of joyful familial moments and bustling festivities stand prominent. These reminiscences compose the fabric of our formative years, moulding our perspectives and values. Today, we invite you on a journey exploring the profound impact of family separation on vulnerable children worldwide. Through personal reflections and inspiring case studies, we will attempt to uncover the transformative power of support programs, emphasizing the need for a global collective to rewrite the narratives of those teetering on the edge of adulthood. As we, at Udayan Care, complete three decades of our practitioner years, we are committed to be delving into the profound repercussions of unnecessary separation on children from their families, and especially as they edge towards becoming majors. Through introspective narratives and compelling case studies, let us unveil the catalytic potential of support initiatives, underscoring the imperative for a

unified collective effort that is needed to redefine the narratives of those reeling on the brink of adulthood, with practically no or little support.

Setting the Stage

Most of us have been fortunate to be nurtured amidst affection and security. However, can you envision a child devoid of that tender embrace or the sanctuary of their home? It is indeed heart-wrenching. It is imperative to examine the predicament of vulnerable children worldwide. A staggering estimate reveals the existence of 140 million orphaned or abandoned children globally, with over 96,000 000 in India alone.

Children, who land up in alternative care or as in India, in child care institutions, for the want of other family-based care models, are the ones, who get separated from their biological families due to issues such as death, abuse, neglect, or abandonment, even poverty. This separation can cause profound emotional trauma and pain, leading to feelings of rejection, loss, and grief, as well as ruptured education and development. These children brave emotional storms, survivors of traumas, yet they often face a system that falls short of support. In the absence of family based care mechanisms, they are sent to Child Care Institutions (CCIs), where due to rigid schedules, regimented routines, restricted opportunities, scarce counselling and guidance, lack of exposure to the outside world, and lack of trainings in life skills – they may not get the kind of thriving environment a child needs to grow up in, nor get the requisite training to sustain themselves once they are out of the CCI, when they become 18, and become care leavers (CLs)!Actually, upon reaching adulthood at eighteen, they are thrust into a realm of uncertainty, devoid of guidance or safety nets, as many times they do not get the mandatory Aftercare support. It gets akin to plummeting into an abyss, devoid of the support structures of

the care system, or family and community, as they were raised away from their families in a CCI. Despite legal mandates stipulating the necessity for continued aftercare support in India and worldwide, the exit from care process for most becomes fraught with challenges owing to a pervasive lack of education, skills training, exposure, awareness and comprehension. On top of that many do not get any aftercare support, which makes them rudderless and may lead them to an unworthy life.

Our Innovative Programme: Udayan *Ghars*

Our Udayan *Ghar* Programme, which we set up in 1996, is grounded in the ethos of relational practices, where long term relationship between children, staff and mentors is developed and trauma informed care is at the heart of it. Our 'Living in Family Environment' (L.I.F.E.), model is a beacon of hope for many vulnerable children in India. Through the establishment of Udayan *Ghars* (13 in number)—warm residential abodes accommodating approximately twelve children aged six to eighteen, as a unit (some homes have 2 units i. e. 24 children, because of changing government norms) — the program endeavours to provide a nurturing familial milieu for those bereft of primary caregiver protection. Adopting a holistic approach encompassing working in unison, a dedicated team of caregivers, including "Mentor Parents" who volunteer for life, professional social workers, mental health care professionals, and other support staff collaborate to offer children the love, protection, and guidance necessary for their growth, nurture the physical, emotional, and educational needs of the children. With a steadfast emphasis on familial bonds, the program not only serves as a surrogate kin but also integrates children into the surrounding middle-class communities, fostering communal involvement and dispelling societal stigmas. The steadfast commitment to quality education, emotional well-

being, healthcare, holistic development, and aftercare underscores the dedication to ensuring that these children not only flourish during their tenure in Udayan *Ghars* but also transition seamlessly into adulthood. Trainings in life skills and employability skills prepare these youth for the life outside.

These homes are situated in middle-class neighbourhoods, fostering extensive community involvement and interaction, thereby enabling children to thrive and become productive and responsible members of society.

Within these homes, all developmental needs of the children are attended to, while their families also receive counselling and support to facilitate the earliest possible reunification with their children. The commitment to restoration, aiming to reunite children with their biological families, by helping and strengthening them and enabling them to take charge of their children, is the purpose with which these homes function. This underscores Udayan Care’s deep understanding of the importance of family ties in a child’s best interest.

The Udayan Ghar model integrates various psychological and ecological frameworks to provide trauma-informed care (TIC) for children in need. Drawing from Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model, and Bowlby's Attachment theory, the model creates a nurturing family-like environment within the Udayan Ghars. Each child receives individualized attention from mentor parents, live-in care staff, mental health specialists, and social workers, fostering reciprocal and positive relationships crucial for self-concept and resilience development. Udayan Care emphasises regular training on trauma-informed care for the caretaker team, enabling them to recognise and address children's coping mechanisms effectively. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, Udayan Care acknowledges the significance of the

environment at Udayan *Ghars* in shaping children's development, the importance of school, friends, community around, and ensures safe physical and emotional spaces tailored to their needs. The decision-making process at these Udayan *Ghars* prioritises child participation and empowerment. By integrating Erikson's theory, LIFE model provides these children with a stability and structure in these homes, positive relationships, sense of purpose, self-esteem, optimistic beliefs and values, open communications, participatory approach in decision making, support in development of belief to attain goals as well as underlying foundations of basic social support that can help repair past traumas and give coping skills for current happenings. Bowlby's Attachment theory underscores the importance of nurturing authentic relationships for healing and support. Through a holistic approach encompassing social, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being, these care homes strive to empower children to regain control over their lives and thrive despite past traumas.

Our FiT Families project addresses this issue by developing prevention programmes as well as Restoration Programmes, but about that, we will talk about in another piece.

Udayan Ghar's Aftercare Programme

With 5 aftercare facilities, and with a commitment to support youth, even if their families are found and they are restored, our youth are supported on every domain of support required by a youth growing up and finding one's feet in the world. The Aftercare Program of Udayan Ghars serves as a vital bridge for young adults aged 18 to 21 who are required to leave their Udayan Ghars at 18, as stipulated in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021. This program ensures continued rehabilitative services and accommodation options, ranging from

community, group, to scattered housing, for these individuals. Its primary goal is to support these young adults in transitioning into their adult responsibilities before reintegrating them into society. Through ongoing assistance in education, mental health support, accommodation, nutrition, soft skills development, career counselling, vocational training, mentoring and job placements, these youths acquire both the skills and confidence necessary to navigate the world and become socially responsible adults with strong ethics and values.

Beyond Udayan *Ghars*: Aftercare Outreach Programme

Udayan Care's effective interventions in the Aftercare program of Udayan Ghars, coupled with the significant research project 'Beyond 18,' conducted in 2018-19, which encompassed over 450 CLs and 100 functionaries across five states of India, laid the groundwork for the Aftercare Outreach Program (AOP) established in 2020. The 'Sphere of Aftercare,' a theoretical framework derived from the aforementioned research, forms the foundation of the AOP. This framework delineates eight domains of support essential for care-experienced youths during and after their transition from CCIs: housing; education and vocational skills; physical health; emotional well-being; independent living skills; social support and interpersonal skills; financial independence and career; and identity and legal awareness. This initiative is designed to provide transitional and rehabilitative support to young individuals with experience in care, who are approaching the age limit for departure from various governmental and non-governmental Child Care Institutions (CCIs). The program incorporates elements such as educational and vocational training, supplementary services tailored to individual needs, internships and job placements, financial assistance, and mentorship. Currently running in 6 states with over

350 care leavers, it also aims to foster a sense of community by uniting them through platforms like the Care Leavers' Networks, many such facilitated by Udayan Care itself.

Udayan Care's impact extends beyond its immediate care facilities, as it actively engages in research and knowledge sharing to advance the broader understanding of child welfare. The organization conducts internal and external research studies, contributing valuable insights for professionals, organizations, and government agencies working in the field. Additionally, the program catalyses change by facilitating visionary individuals and volunteers to establish and manage Udayan Ghars voluntarily. Through this model, Udayan Care has not only provided a lifeline for thousands of children but has also set a precedent for a compassionate and effective approach to out-of-home care children.

Case Studies: Narratives of Resilience and Triumph

In our exploration of the transformative potential of support programs, let us delve into poignant case studies that epitomize resilience and triumph.

Narmdi - Cultivating Artistic Aspirations

Narmdi, orphaned at eleven, found solace and support in one of our childcare institutions, modelled on the principles of L.I.F.E. (Living In Family Environment). Through academic guidance, counselling, and encouragement, she not only excelled in her academic pursuits in school, but also discovered a passion for art. Presently, she is pursuing the final year of Bachelors of Fine Arts, symbolizing a transformative odyssey from adversity to accomplishment. She is deeply committed to the cause of others like her, graduating from Child Care Institutions, a recipient of LIFT

(Learning in ????), where she is actively involved in advocating for the rights of such youth in visual format, she is also setting up a care leavers network in Uttar Pradesh, by bringing CLs together.

Anjali - Flourishing in Hospitality

Anjali’s early years were marred by emotional trauma, yet consistent warmth, guidance, and love provided to her at one of our homes propelled her towards academic excellence. Transitioning to the Aftercare program at 18, she secured the first position in her class and is now pursuing a Bachelor’s in Hotel Management and Catering. Anjali’s story underscores the profound impact of a supportive environment on personal growth. Her skills at her internship venues has always won her managers’ approbation and now she is looking forward to a final placement.

Rohit- Embarking on a Journey from Abandonment to Assurance

Rohit, abandoned at three with scant recollection of his family, grappled with linguistic and self-assurance challenges. Through the Aftercare Outreach Program, he not only completed a refrigeration repair course but also secured employment at the Refrigeration unit of the TATA group. Rohit's narrative epitomizes the metamorphosis feasible with an adept support structure.

Mukesh - Forging the Path to Chartered Accountancy

Mukesh, adrift after a childhood spent in a Children’s home, rekindled hope through support initiatives. Encouraged during an orientation session, when we deci9ded to on board him in our Aftercare Outreach Programme, he articulated his aspiration of becoming a chartered accountant. With

guidance, financial backing, and determination, Mukesh enrolled in B.Com, pursued a Tally course, and is on the trajectory to realizing his ambition.

Global Impact: Care Leavers Networks

Beyond individual success narratives, the establishment of Care Leavers Networks has emerged as a potent agent of change. Udayan Care has provided support to many care leavers in different cities to set up to their own networks, after the first successful launch of Delhi Clan in 2018. The success of networks in bring together the youth to a support structure also whetted our desire to bring together an international community of care leavers. The inaugural International Care Leavers Convention in 2020, with the help of 3 other international organisations, SOS Children's Villages, University of Hildesheim, Germany and Kinder Perspectief from Netherlands, united care experienced youth worldwide. The 2022 online convention again strengthened the network. This global consortium today serves as a platform for care leavers globally to connect, exchange experiences, and actively contribute to shaping their destinies.

The Call to Collective Action

Taking its cue from the resounding words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others", in a world besieged by challenges, Udayan Care takes on the challenge to support and uplift the most vulnerable amongst us: our children and youth, who are out of home care, and are grappling with circumstances beyond their purview.

Conclusion

The imperative to forestall familial separation, fortify families, and establish a continuum of care is a shared obligation. Every child merits the opportunity to burgeon, learn, and thrive and that can happen only if relational practices are at the heart of the model. We beseech each of you to assume the roles of mentor, benefactor, or advocate. Experience the profound gratification of not only metamorphosing a life but also evolving personally throughout this impactful expedition, the way our mentor parents' experience.

Together, let us embark on this transformative trajectory, erecting a future wherein every child and youth's potential is actualized, wherein hope supplants despair, and wherein every life is treasured and empowered. The journey toward empowerment and wholesomeness starts with a step, and we invite you to take that step with us, in developing relationships that will heal such children and youth.

DR. KIRAN MODI is Founder and Managing Trustee of Udayan Care, India, and a member of the CYC-Net Board of Governors.

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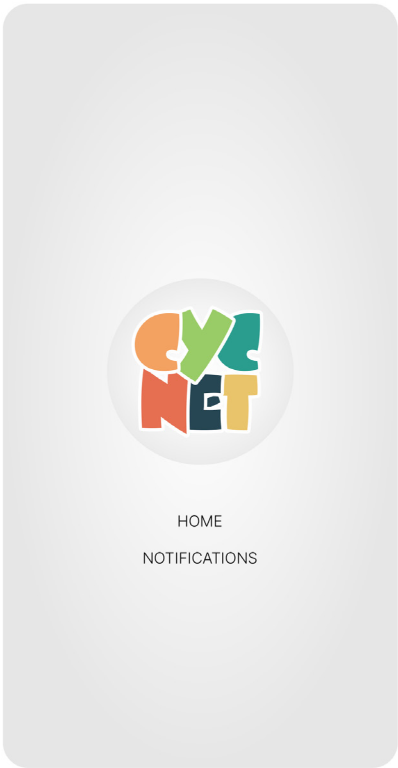


All About Us

Gloria Bullock

Foreword: Travis Sampson

Everywhere you go, there you are.

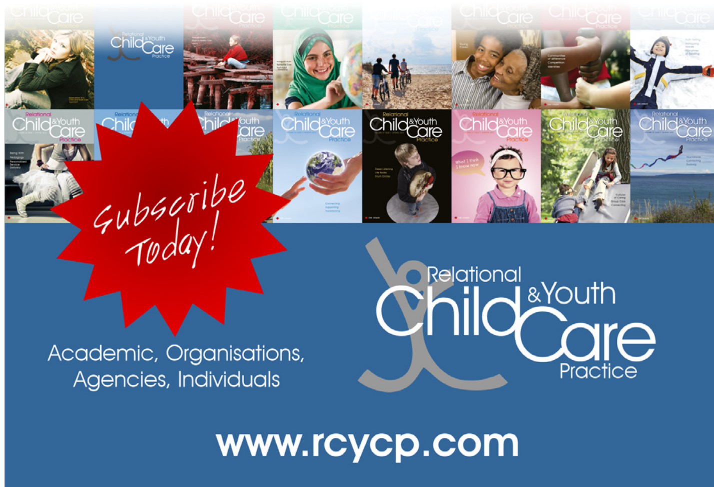
It is a simple adage, an old one, and one that is often attributed to Confucious. I won't write here and pretend to be an expert on Confucious and Chinese philosophy. I am not that. But I do like this nugget of thought about the Self, and I often use it in conversations about practice when discussing how I, and others, are showing up in the work that we do.

It is one of the more direct and obvious statements that has survived through the ages. I mean, physically, yes, wherever we place ourselves, we are, indeed, there. But I like to think about it in the context of our perspective, our beliefs about the things we are seeing, hearing, and experiencing with the rest of our five senses. Everywhere we go, we carry our values and attitudes. And these values, attitudes, and beliefs have all been informed by our past experiences. The memories of events, of relationships, and especially the memories of how we *felt* cannot be left on the shelf before work. These are the Self we carry around with us.

Everywhere we go, there we are.

I would argue (in fact I am about to), that this millennia-old adage is echoed in one of the characteristics that defines Child and Youth Care practice, It's All About Us (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi, Fulcher, 2018). Mann-Feder (2009) highlights for us that many, if not all, other professions

that therapeutically engage with people, pride themselves on detachment. She points out that professional distance is the stated goal, critical to their therapeutic process. This is not true for Child and Youth Care Practitioners. Our focus is on fostering healthy *attachment* between us and those we support, the very opposite of detachment (Mann-Feder, 2009). We do not have the luxury, as my most influential mentor has said to *and* in front of me many times, of leaving ourselves at the door. We don't rely on tools, techniques and the implementation of external controls and influences to support those we work with. We use our Selves (Mann-Feder, 2009). And, if we are using our Selves in practice, then our engagement with others, the way we perceive their behaviors and choices, the interventions we choose to embark on, and the hills we choose to die on when setting limits are all deeply informed by who *we* are (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi, Fulcher 2018).



So then, considering this, it seems rather important to *know* who we are and when our Self is informing our initial beliefs or perceptions related to any given situation with a young person. For most anyone who has taken an introductory Child and Youth Care Practice course, this is something they have heard before. The idea that we need to consider how our values, beliefs, and past experiences are impacting the way we engage in relationship with people is not novel in our field. The reality is though, it's not always easy to do.

There is another quote I enjoy when thinking about practice, and to be honest, I don't know who to attribute it to because, based on my research, no one else does either. It has many phrasings that offer a similar meaning, so I'll give you the one I like the best (it is all about me after all). Forgive me my academic trespasses for failing to reference it. Anyway, it is: It ain't what you don't know that gets you in trouble, it's what you know for sure that just ain't so. For me this quote highlights one of the most dangerous things we can do in practice: when we mistake our perspective (what we *think* we know for sure, that just ain't so) with the reality of any given interaction.

When we enter school-based practice while carrying around the memory of how it felt to be ridiculed consistently by an elementary school bully (the fear, the loneliness, and the shame) our awareness of that part of our Self becomes vital. We will need to be with young people having this experience. If we aren't tuned in to this part of Self, we might not see the line between us and a young person experiencing the same type of ridicule and social marginalization. We might protect that part of Self we carry around with us through our relational engagement with this young person. We could lose sight of the difference between empathy and sympathy and get lost in 'feeling bad' for the young person, which, I would argue, is never helpful, or therapeutic. We become protectors. Guardians. We don't look to support young people to navigate the bullying, engage in restorative

conflict resolution with the bully, or to work on building protective relationships with others, we simply aim to shield them, perhaps how we wish we might have been shielded.

And what about the bully?

Blinded by the impact of Self in this situation, we may be unable to see the bully as anything other than the villain. They aren't just targeting a young person we are working with, they are attacking *us,* the Self we take everywhere with us. Without an awareness of Self, our practice is nothing more than us playing out what we imagined we should have had or done when we were bullied all those years ago. This is especially dangerous given that it is not only a perceived victim of bullying that needs support, but the bully themselves. Our past experiences inform our interpretations of how things are (Ricks, 2001). If we aren't aware of this process as it is occurring, it can have a profound impact on the relationships we share with young people. How can we, for example, offer therapeutic relational engagement to someone we have ascribed the title of 'villain' to solely based (unknowingly) on our own past experiences?

The following reflection is an illustration of how it really is all about us. It is a pre-service Practitioner's consideration of an intense experience of Self as she navigated her first practicum experience. Of course, she heard the faculty facilitating her course work talk about this concept of Self, and the importance of having an awareness of how it shows up in practice with young people and families. But as Julius Caesar is credited with coining (this guy with the quotes): Experience is the best teacher. And while engaged with a young person during her practicum, she experienced Self unexpectedly and reflected on how it impacted her engagement in the moment. She began to understand:

Everywhere I go, there I am.

What Being Me Means to Me

"I will always make the best possible choice for the child."

At least that's what I would have told you before experiencing the true complexities of the field. I went into my first practicum with all the knowledge from classes and an open mind. I spent the first semesters eager to learn and absorbing all I could. We learned about Self and how it shows up in practice, but I never imagined how much it could impact my work. Most interactions I had left me feeling confident, but this interaction was different. It challenged me in a way that no class could have prepared me for. In my second week, I was faced with an ethical dilemma that brought up a lot of emotions for me, but I did not know why. I could feel the tension between my actions and the effects they could have in a youth's life. Since I naturally gravitate to self-reflection, I took the time to check in with myself. As I sifted through all the emotions, I was faced with values I never knew I held so strongly. And the more I sat with this interaction, the more I realized that my attempt to help the youth may have been meeting my needs in the moment rather than theirs. After reviewing the questions posed in Mann-Feder and Steckley's Reflexive Relational Model, I began to realize just how deeply conflicted I felt even after supervision (Mann-Feder & Steckley, 2021). I went through every question and mapped out exactly what happened and what I could have done differently. This critical reflection changed my perspective on my responsibility as a future Child and Youth Care Practitioner (CYC-P) and what it means to work with youth.

My practicum took place in a school-based environment, so when a student sat next to me during the after-school tutoring sessions, I was very willing to help. I had interacted with this student before and knew that they were not fluent in English, but when I saw that their assignment was for English class, I was relieved. I was nervous about tutoring before practicum,

but English is the subject I'm most confident in, so I was eager to jump in. We moved to a quieter study space, and I pulled up a translator to communicate. However, when I translated a simple question into their first language, I was surprised when they had the translator read it out loud. I also noticed that they would only take voice calls or send voice notes on their phone to communicate. As I interacted with them more, it became clear that they likely could not read or write in both English and their native language. In the program I was shadowing, the role of the CYC-Ps was to identify and assist youth academically. There was a CYC-P nearby, but I did not ask for their help. Instead, I continued to help the student with their assignment the best that I could on my own. I think in this moment, my stubbornness and personal values began to peek through. I believed that I was the best person to handle it. However, it was obvious that they did not understand the assignment at all and nothing I could do would change that. I tried several methods and combinations to communicate including the translator, spelling out words, speaking slowly, and referring to the webpages. Nothing seemed to help. After more than an hour, the assignment was finished, and the youth seemed genuinely proud of themselves. However, I felt I did much of the work for them. I walked away with my confidence shaken, questioning my approach, my abilities, and my competence as a CYC-P. How much help was too much help? And why was I so adamant about helping them on my own?

After this interaction, I went to speak with my mentor to debrief the situation. She said that while what I did seemed to be empathetic, she could make sense of how I felt conflicted. Another member of staff then said that the role of the organization was to help with academic hurdles, not remove them, which got me thinking. In the days following, I began considering the impact of my decision to not seek help and handle it on my own. Clearly, I was not equipped to handle the situation, but I pushed forward. In doing so,

maybe I created even more problems for the student. I feared that I would make the youth feel like they were incapable or stupid, but how I was helping didn't get them closer to understanding their assignment. My actions could have a ripple effect, spanning much further than I considered in the moment. For example, if their teacher were to question them about the assignment, they would not be able to answer. They could be accused of cheating, or they could get a call home which might affect their family dynamics. Even if the teacher did not suspect their work, I affected the student's academic future since they did not complete the outcomes but finished the assignment. I also potentially set the expectation for other tutors and the CYC-Ps will just do the work for them which is a dangerous precedent to set. What was once a choice made with the best intentions started to feel selfish. I was carrying the weight of all the possible outcomes, so I turned to reflection to sort through my feelings. I knew there was a better course of action as soon as the interaction ended. In the moment, I felt like I was doing the best I could for the youth, but that was because I was not recognizing my role due to my own values and experiences.

And so, I took a step back to look at the bigger picture. Why did this interaction affect me so much? What about this situation triggered me? When I experienced a flood of emotions, I knew they played a major role in how I approached the youth, even though I did not realize until afterwards. For as long as I can remember, I've had this fear of being interpreted as incompetent, likely due to being considered smart as a young child. So, when I began to struggle with my schoolwork past elementary school, I created this idea that I would never be good enough. I went as far as refusing to try French immersion in junior high because I was scared to fail. This perception followed me all through secondary and post-secondary education. I set expectations for myself high, and despite working hard, I

struggled to complete schoolwork due to undiagnosed ADHD. For so long, I attributed my setbacks solely to my intelligence and competence, so changing my perspective has been difficult. Through these experiences, I developed one of my core beliefs: to always do my best whatever that may look like. In my eyes, the youth was doing the best they could. I could see how hard they were working, and I wanted to acknowledge that. This youth's resiliency brought up memories of trying to read before I was diagnosed as an adult. I could empathize with the feeling of inadequacy, so I clung to that to justify my actions. In reality, I was drawing from my own experiences rather than assessing the needs of the youth.

However, I think why I was compelled to help better explains my emotional response. Yes, my personal experiences in the school system clearly informed my actions, but observations in my upbringing were the driving force. My mother immigrated to Canada from Italy at 15 years old, unable to speak the language, and with very few supports. The community she lived in all spoke Italian, and without an education, it was difficult to get opportunities. It wasn't until she was in her 20s that she learned English. Even over 50 years later, my mother is made to feel like she is incompetent by others because English is not her first language. My friends would say they could not understand her accent, and when I was out with her, people would ask me to 'translate', even though she was speaking English. My mother is not a strong speaker, or reader, or writer, but I would never say my mom is not intelligent. So often people assume her intelligence based on her accent without acknowledging the barriers she's had to overcome. Even now she laments how people make her feel stupid, and I believe this heavily influenced my approach. Growing up with a first-generation mother, I saw firsthand how people will write off those with an accent or who struggled to speak English. I could see the parallels between my mother and this student, and it struck a nerve for me personally. Seeing the same systemic

problems persisting for newcomers over 50 years later frustrated me. I didn't want this student to think I was writing them off too. I think that is why I felt the need to take it upon myself to help, but instead, I projected my own emotions onto the youth. Part of me was trying to heal my mother's pain, and the youth became the outlet for my feelings.

The blind hatred of what people don't understand will always exist. My feelings around my mother's migration story were influential in a subversive way. While my school trauma was easy to identify for me, I never knew I carried around the weight of my mother's experiences. This was an aspect of myself I had never explored. I have always been extremely proud of my Italian heritage, especially being Sicilian. My siblings and I were teased frequently about being members of the mafia, and I would always vehemently defend my culture. I dealt with a fraction of the trauma with the teasing, but 50 years ago, being Sicilian meant your skin was darker, you supported Mussolini, you were more savage and violent. This mindset made me think about my morning bus ride of all things. At a bus stop in the community in which the youth resides, the words "your kind breeds hate" was spray painted on the bus shelter. Though it wasn't explicit, the meaning felt clear. Their religion or when they were born was being branded as evil which perpetuates this stigma around newcomers. Just their mere existence to some is a threat to society. I may have heard and seen this kind of hatred before, but spending time in their community opened my own generational wounds. While I thought I was just helping this person with their homework, my brain was in defense mode, ready to shield them the way no one had done for my mother. The parallels I created between my mother and the youth did not help them, it worked to fulfill my desire to protect them. But this youth didn't need protection, and certainly not from me.

I knew I would be working in a community with a large newcomer population, but this situation caught me off guard. I was fully prepared to communicate through translators, but the gaps that exist in the educational system for newcomer youth frustrated me. The more research I did, the more I realized how few opportunities newcomer youth have for English as an Additional Language (EAL). And yet, they're expected to enter high school, sit through an eight-hour school day, and be able to succeed. This stirred up emotions when it came to the youth's basic rights. I thought about how the youth must feel in school all day unable to understand and wondered how that might correlate with the youth's right to education. According to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of a Child, I feel the youth's rights may be violated as cited in article 28, the access to education. It states that, "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children" (United Nations, 1990, Section 1.d). The youth can sit in a classroom, but that does not make education accessible. By not providing enough resources to newcomer youth to learn the language, or at the very least a translator, I believe their right to education is compromised. I could feel my anger about a system and how they are set up to fail. I think that my own fear of failure triggered here. It felt unfair to me, and I think that's why I couldn't bring myself to step away. It wasn't their fault the system was failing them, so why should they have to fail? How are youth expected to learn and graduate if they do not understand? However, my actions didn't get them any closer to learning English. I was left feeling like I was contributing to the problem by making sure they passed.

Overall, I could have considered the Child and Youth Care Certification Board (2017) Code of Ethics and my ethical responsibilities in much more

depth. When looking into my responsibility to self, I could have been more aware of my own values and feelings. I was very apprehensive about the tutoring aspect of this position, so I was clearly ill-equipped to handle this situation on my own and should have had more awareness of my role. I would consider this my first interaction during practicum that truly challenged my personal values (though it was not the last), and I struggled to identify that in the moment. I am still developing the necessary skills to benefit youth, but this experience helped me to be more intentional in future interactions. Since practicum is part of my education, I consider this experience to be an extension of my ongoing development as a CYC-P. I was hard on myself right after my interaction, so I made sure to attend to my own self-care by seeking guidance and attend to my feelings on the situation. My emotional wellbeing was impacted by this interaction, so I also used my process of self-reflection to help me attend to my self-care. (Child and Youth Care Certification Board, 2017).

While I recognized that I had an ethical lapse during the interaction, I also was a learner in that moment. None of the staff reprimanded me for my decision, but rather they wanted me to reflect and use it as an opportunity to grow. Their support helped me to be gentler on myself and recognize that my choices stemmed from deep seeded values that I had never identified before. A better choice in that moment would have been to step away, call a student-parent support worker (SPSW) for help with their homework, and be an observer. Considering my role and experience in the field, I think this would have been the most ethical way forward. The outcomes from my choices have been extremely informative. When I got home that night, I sent a case note for the interaction to who I thought was their SPSW and followed up with them. I learned that this student was very new to the program and did not have an SPSW assigned to them yet, which became high priority due to their language barrier. Without my interaction, it

may have taken much longer for this student to receive the help they needed. The gravity of this interaction truly shows how ethics is not confined to crisis moments or life changing situations. Ethics can show up in the seemingly mundane interactions in our practice, but it is how we choose to show up to those moments that makes the difference.

I am glad that I advocated for this student and made them feel safe in the space, despite the possible consequences of my approach. It gave me a new appreciation for what newcomers go through, especially teens, when integrating into an entirely new culture. Through research and relationship building, I developed a new passion for the rights of newcomer youth. At this time, it is beyond what I can achieve as a student, but it has given me a goal to work towards in terms of incorporating advocacy into my practice. Most importantly, this experience taught me a lot about myself. A wise faculty member told me on my first day of practicum, “you can’t save the world your first day of practicum. You can’t burn it down either!”, so I waited until at least my fifth day to try! One thing I’ve always known about myself is that I have a lot of passion and I strive for improvement. And the first step in my improvement has been getting to know myself. There’s a lot more to learn, and I can’t wait to meet the practitioner I will become.

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GLORIA BULLOCK lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and is a first year Child and Youth Care (CYC) student at Nova Scotia Community College. She spent 2 years at Acadia University for Political Science but chose to pivot her career path. She realized her passions were working with youth and supporting her community. She hopes to enter the field as a CYC Practitioner next year after graduation.

TRAVIS SAMPSON is a husband and father of two boys. He is a Child and Youth Care Practitioner from Nova Scotia, Canada. He graduated from Nova Scotia Community College's (NSCC) Child and Youth Care (CYC) Diploma program in 2012. He spent the first 6 years of his career working in 24/7 group care programs in Halifax, Nova Scotia before spending 2 years in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut working both frontline, and as Program Manager in a live-in care program supporting Inuit youth. He also spent 3 years in school-based practice as Nova Scotia incorporated Child and Youth Care Practitioners into the provincial education system. He is currently a full-time faculty member in the CYC Program at NSCC.

Relational CYC Practice is thriving in South Africa Gate Duty

Zeni Thumbadoo

In the Isibindi Ezikoleni project, relational practice in school-based child and youth care work facilitates child and youth care workers intervening in the very difficult life situations of young people living in (often extreme) poverty. There are numerous important moments in the school day, but the day begins for CYCWs with "gate duty". This involves child and care workers being at schools, bright and early in the mornings early to 'hang out' at the school gates and as children make their way into school. This transitional time from home and community to school can be fraught with painful experiences for young people. The shame that is ever-present in children growing up in poverty in unequal societies is itself an issue to manage. Neglect and abuse, substance abuse and bullying are real and threatening factors for children to navigate in communities and school settings. Teenage pregnancy and the burdens of young mothers attending schools are the typical issues CYCWs respond to daily. In the morning as children come into school their problems spill over into the school day.

At the gate, at the start of the school day, CYCWs express their kindness and warmth, their attentiveness and emotional presence as they

appear, to the untrained eye, to do nothing much. But to those in the know, the characteristics of relational child and youth care practice are in play and open CYCWs into the worlds of challenges faced by the young people they meet. Noticing children and their behavior, engaging and connecting with them, being present and responsive in the moments, making the morning moments of arriving to school special and important is what happens in “gate duty”. Noticing and responding to bullying incidents, picking up signs of child abuse and following up, observing neglect in children, makes this time in the morning very busy and very significant in school-based child and youth care practice in South Africa. The snippets below are examples of relational CYCW in practice in South African schools just happening around “gate duty” ...

> A child came running towards a CYCW crying. The CYCW knelt down to hug the child and held her while the child shared that a man had been chasing her. She was terribly scared. The CYCW walked with the learner into their safe space. The learner was given a soft toy to help her to calm down, and the child told the CYCWs about all the unsafe spaces in the community that scare her and her friends. When she had recovered her composure the CYCW accompanied the child to her class and reported the matter to her parents and the school principal. The child’s parents are now accompanying her to school daily, and the child was referred for additional trauma counselling. The police now patrol the unsafe spaces that the child identified.
>
> The CYCW observed a learner who was always quiet in the morning when he got out of the school taxi. He always looked sad, and the CYCW observed the learner and found him alone at

break time, not eating his food provided by the school. When she approached him and tried to talk to him he did not respond. The next day she tried connecting with him again during break, and she saw that the boy was upset and crying. She was emotionally present with him in his distress and eventually he explained that there was an older boy who was bullying him and taking his food every day. The CYCW together with the school principal had a meeting with both learners and took a restorative approach to the matter. The older boy apologized and asked for forgiveness and promised to stop. The learner accepted this and now seems happy and plays with other learners during break time. The older boy also stopped the bullying on the school bus. The CYCW checks on the learner every day to see if he is fine and he is!

The CYCW met a teenage girl who was late for school and when asked why by the CYCW, she said that her daughter was sick. She explained when the CYCW expressed her support for her as a young mother that she had more challenges. This girl was living alone and had no contact with her own mother for 2 years. Her mother was living in another province. She had survived the 2 years solely on asking neighbors for food and through her daughter's child support grant. The CYC listened to her, and the girl seemed relieved to be telling her story. After seeking her consent the CYCW shared this information with the school principal and immediately began to source tangible support in the form of food parcels and medical care for the baby. She later tracked down the girl's mother, updated her on the situation with her daughter, supported her see her responsibility to assist her child and grandchild. Arrangements were made for the learner to

go and live with her aunt who is now supporting both her and her child. The learner is coming to school early, with a clean school uniform and now able to concentrate at school. Her mother now calls her regularly to check up on her and they are re-building their relationship.

A CYCW noticed a young boy wearing white takkies and not the required black school shoes. When asked about what had happened to his school shoes, he said he didn't have any. With support from the school the CYCW immediately found a spare pair of shoes that fitted him and he was so happy. He now fitted into school and was not marked as being so poor that he did not have the right shoes. A visit to his home was also undertaken to understand and support his mother understand her responsibility to her son.

A CYCW noticed an 8-year-old boy who was burnt very badly on the side of his face. She immediately talked to him to find out what had transpired. A boy shared that he has a 6 year old younger sister who is at the same school as him. His father yesterday evening was angry that he hadn't cooked supper and burnt him with the hot iron. This was an emergency and the CYCW immediately drew in the support of the school principal, called in the local social worker and was right by his side during the ensuing discussions – where it emerged that his sister was also sexually abused by the father. The children were immediately moved to a safe place and the father was arrested.

> The CYCW noticed 4 high school learners coming to school under the influence of drugs and being untidy and unwashed. The CYCW called them into a discussion and various reasons for taking drugs and not wanting to attend school emerged, linked to neglect at home. The CYCW was then able to do a home visit and draw in ongoing support to the families and the learners from other service providers to create a safety network around the learners.
>
> The CYCW observed that 4 children from the same family often arrived at school with dirty uniforms and sometimes seemed hungry. She met with the family and found out that they were living with their mother who is unemployed and there was often no food at home – as they all live on only one child support grant ($30). The CYCW has engaged with the mother to assist her to access a regular food parcel, apply for child support grants for other children, draw up a budget, and assist with improved hygiene practices. She is also advocating at the Department of Housing for their own home.

On a happier note, gate duty also involves CYCWs being present and welcoming new first graders coming to school for the first time. They are at the gate, warmly greeting the little ones and encouraging the other children to be welcoming too. This is also a happy responsibility of CYCWs in high schools when the eighth graders arrive for the first time. This ritual where the CYCWs are very present and available to settle new children in sets a tone for the rest of the young people and mitigates against bullying as new children are welcomed into the school.

Gate duty, its often a time to celebrate the exciting days on the national calendar such as heritage day, where one dresses up in traditional clothes and welcomes children to school with traditional dance and song! This is a time when relational CYCW opens doors into children's worlds.

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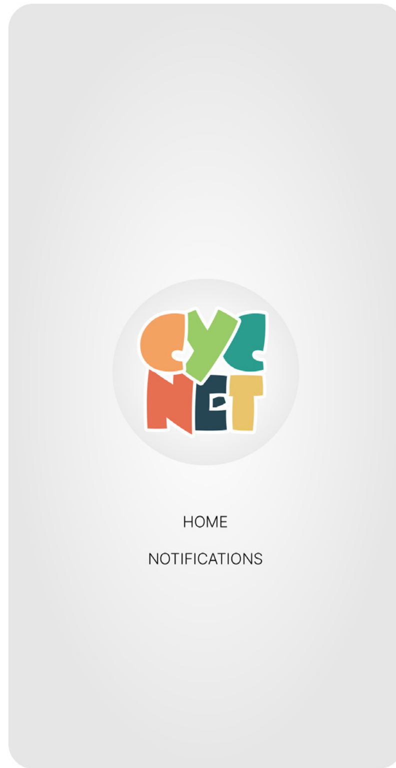

Space Engagers

James Freeman

In shared spaces, where shadows blend;
Edges soften, trust begins.
Reflections help us see within;
And wounds begin to mend.

There's a lot of emphasis on space in our field. Personal space. Taking space. Shared space. Life space. I've even read on incident reports descriptions of young people being in good space and bad space. I know what the writers intended, but something always seemed off to me about that.

The physicality of space is fairly easy to understand. We feel violated if someone gets closer than we wanted. We can respect a physical boundary and give someone more room. Relational space is different. It has physical aspects but also more than that. Notice how when you're around certain people your emotions change. Your sense of hope or despair varies. Beliefs are influenced (e.g., "I've got this" vs "Why even try"). And future pathways are determined (e.g., "I can trust others" vs "I can't trust anyone").

There are dimensions of these spaces that are physical, mental, relational, and even virtual (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013). And on a larger scale we share a spiritual space. Something we all sense and is often hidden below the surface inside us and around us.

In relational spaces we can think about how we engage in the action of co-creation. In a conversation with Thom Garfat he describes “there’s a shared relational space we co-create with others and it’s here we create the experience of self in connection”. He’s pointing us to the idea that what some people need is to have a different experience of themselves in relationship with others. Here is where we have the opportunity to create what the space looks and feels like together.

In these moments of connection and engagement we can find opportunities to see more clearly and experience more deeply. The outcome isn’t predetermined. Of course in the helping relationship there is an aim or intent and maybe even a few goals. Yet until we realize there’s an aspect of letting go and being open ourselves we can’t truly engage in co-creating spaces together.

Vygotsky tells us human development occurs dynamically through social interaction. The places this occurs are physical - at schools, parks, bridges, and buildings. And they are relational - in connections, conversations, shared experiences, and being together.

Changing the world is symbiotic with changing ourselves because "human consciousness springs from material, social activity, and that by transforming the world we also transform ourselves" (Sawyer, 2014). When we show up in relational spaces to be an advocate, a helper, or guide, we also see our own shadows and find our own edges. It's the process itself that changes us and changes the world.

If you would like to hear the whole conversation between James Freeman and Thom Garfat, visit www.training-grounds.net/relational-care

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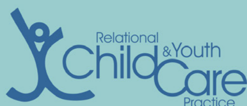

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A New Twist in My Thinking

Mark Strother

It is always a delight to see Thom Garfat's name in my "inbox." When I saw it was a request for an article I immediately started reminiscing about cherished conversations with Thom. He was always good at encouraging me, challenging my reasoning, even challenging my choice of words. These memories put me to recalling my own past development and to further analyzing my current musings. My choice in topic is admittedly selfish, as most readers will have traveled a similar path, but possibly there are some unique connections to be made and at least it might encourage others to pause and ponder their own professional and personal development, where they started, how far they have come, and what might be next; not just in accomplishment, but in thinking. (Ideally, it might trigger a chat (debate?) with Thom.)

I started working with youth in the late '70s. Some of those years were in more clinical residential settings, such as a treatment center, but the majority of my experience has been in ranch or wilderness settings. The last twenty-two years have been at Cal Farley's Boys Ranch where I am the Chief Operating Officer.

Currently, I believe I have reached a new phase in my thinking and perspective on life in general. The shift largely revolves around the brain,

biology, and behavior. But, before delving into the current argument raging in my head, I think I should give some context.

I came about my fascination with the brain honestly. I was in my late twenties and had been working with youth locked in self-defeating behaviors. At that time, I don't ever remember considering any type of neural functioning in regard to the behavior of those with whom I worked. It was my parents' brains that ultimately took me there.

First, it was my mother. She had minor, hardly noticeable, tremors for years, but then they started to increase in magnitude, and she was experiencing strange difficulties with movement. She also was experiencing an increase in anxiety. It was misdiagnosed for a significant period, but eventually, she received the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. So, I soon learned about the devastation that a degeneration of neurons in the brain that produce the neurotransmitter dopamine could cause. It was long before Michael J. Fox was diagnosed with the disease, and it didn't seem that the general public, nor I, was that aware of the oncoming misery. For a long time, it was treated with an overwhelming cocktail of medications. Then, a new remedy was offered. A thalamotomy, a neurosurgical procedure that involves creating a functional lesion in a part of the brain known as the thalamus. During thalamotomy, a hole is bored through the front of the skull and a tiny electrical probe is placed in the thalamus to create a lesion that can alleviate symptoms such as involuntary movements and tremors. Interestingly, the patient must remain conscious during the procedure. This allows the surgical team to interact with the patient and monitor their neurological responses in real time, ensuring the accuracy of the procedure and minimizing potential damage to the surrounding brain areas. The patient's awareness and ability to respond can be crucial for the success of the operation, as it helps the surgeon to target the correct area of the brain more precisely. The procedure was relatively new at the time,

sometimes initiated on both sides of the brain and, at times, only in one hemisphere. A procedure on the left hemisphere would improve functioning on the right side of the body and, conversely, a procedure on the right hemisphere would improve functioning on the left side of the body. Unfortunately, because of age and other factors, she did not qualify for the procedure on both hemispheres. A decision had to be made – left or right. Her symptoms were worse on the left side of the body, but she was right hand dominant. The decision was made to improve the functioning on the dominant side. The surgery was successful and provided some immediate relief for a period. For years the shocking barrage of medications was continued, but eventually the disease ravaged her body and mind and had her begging her son for his pocketknife so that she could end her misery. (I denied her the relief.)

While the brain scans, neurosurgical procedures and drugs were uncomfortably intriguing, it was all physiological (brain/body) and totally logical while tragic. During the time of my mother's positive reaction to the surgery and before she returned to her previous misery, my father was considering retiring early to have more quality time with her (both in their early 60's). Despite his good intentions, he had a major stroke instead. He lost a brain mass the size of a tangerine in the right temporal lobe. (Surprisingly, during the surgery, they discovered he had unknowingly suffered a previous aneurism which had destroyed a brain mass the size of a golf ball.) The neurosurgeon emerged from the operating room and reported the loss in brain mass (both in the right hemisphere). Channeling some medical tv drama, I asked, "What's the prognosis, paralysis on the left side of the body?" The answer was yes, arm, leg, total left side, but hopefully with little effect to speech. I'll never forget what happened next. He said, "One more thing, he may lose his inhibition."

Whoa, what? Lose a few neurons and synapses in a specific area and you can predict the loss of inhibition? He related a story of a successful business executive who sustained loss in the same region. The executive recovered and returned to work. He maintained his substantial knowledge of financial expertise and had no issues in recognizing a vast array of clients and coworkers. However, evidently the neurons he did lose were responsible for telling him not to get up from the table during a business meeting and urinate in the potted plant in the corner of the board room. The surgeon then excused himself to make his next operation and suggested I read Oliver Sack's book, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat." I was stunned. Sure enough, just as predicted, my father indeed lost a significant amount of inhibition if not all.

I think the reason that I found this so unsettling was my dualistic perspective on mind and brain at that point in time. I held that mind was a non-physical entity that could not be fully explained by the workings of the physical brain. I totally separated the physical and the mental. I did not see subjectivity, intentionality, and consciousness grounded in biology.

My parents passed decades ago and in those subsequent decades I continued to work with youth. The seemingly endless line of young men and women I worked with taught me much and challenged me to learn more. My obsession with the brain continued and my bookshelves became loaded with Drs. Oliver Sacks, Joseph Ledoux, Antonio Demasio, V. S. Ramachandran, Luis Cozolino, Daniel Kahneman, and the like. Much of this proved superfluous in regard to my work, but there was a thread of learning that proved invaluable.

Meanwhile, Reclaiming Youth International, the International Child and Youth Care Network, the Child Trauma Academy (later to become the Neurosequential Network), and the Search Institute provided me with an invaluable network of incredible teachers, mentors and colleagues. Through

that network, study, and experience the factors that help someone "thrive" became clearer. As did the factors that challenge a life. I learned the extreme importance of the fetal environment, the early years of development and then that of the adolescent years. All of this within the context of the developing brain. I acquired a new respect for the lasting effects of trauma, neglect, and poverty. I was fascinated by Sapolsky's work on stress (Dr. Robert M. Sapolsky, Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers) and, as I watched his Stanford lectures on YouTube, I was struck by his warning of what can happen when you look at behavior through the narrow lens of a single discipline.

Patterns and themes kept emerging, things kept connecting and when a concept or an approach didn't resonate with the establishing patterns it was tossed. The more the puzzle pieces came together, the more the pieces made sense. And the more the puzzle pieces came together and made sense, the more obvious it became that certain pieces were not meant for this puzzle.

One of the most useful things I learned was the importance of framing questions. In trying to solve a challenge, how you pose the question has a massive influence on shaping the answer.

- Instead of asking, "What can I do to this person to make them change?" ask, "What has caused this person to persist in this behavior?" (Brendtro)
- Asking, "What happened to this person?" rather than" What is wrong with this person?" (Perry)

All of this proved helpful, and I hope I at least provided some assistance to those who deserved so much more than I could provide. I also hope that

my interaction added some value to the amazing teams and individuals with whom I have been fortunate enough to work.

So, here I am today, still struggling to improve my work but, honestly, my thinking on these matters had pretty much stagnated. And then, Sapolsky reentered the scene. That would be Dr. Robert M. Sapolsky with his take on “free will” (“Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will”). It took my obsession with the brain, wove together most of my previously formed beliefs, and provided the possibility of an even broader structure of exploration and understanding. It challenged me and twisted my brain up like nothing else has for decades. Even if you don’t totally “buy” his premise, it is an incredible thinking experiment. Personally, I find it extremely convincing while seriously difficult to imagine and, when I struggle to imagine it, I wonder if it’s not my ego getting in the way. Even Sapolsky states, “This is what I’ve concluded, for a long, long time. And even I think that taking that seriously sounds absolutely nutty.” and, “As I said, even I think it’s crazy to take seriously all the implications of there being no free will.” He doubts that he will convince many that they have no free will but hopes that they will realize that they have much less than they thought.

His perspective is drawn from interdisciplinary research – biology, neuroscience, psychology, and environmental studies. Bottom line, he presents the argument that our behavior is determined by a complex interplay of our genetics, environment, and experiences while free will is a post hoc illusion. Sapolsky posits that the deterministic nature of these factors leaves little room for the concept of free will as traditionally understood.

He argues that the biological determinants of behavior extend across time and space, influenced by events that occurred long before and far away from the individual's immediate context. This perspective suggests that our actions are the sum of influences that we have no control over,

such as our evolutionary history, genetic makeup, and early environmental exposures.

The notion is that every aspect of behavior has deterministic, prior causes. “Prior to a behavior, there is an action of neurons in this or that section of the brain in the preceding second. And in the seconds to minutes before, those neurons were activated by a thought, a memory, an emotion, or sensory stimuli. And in the hours to days before that behavior occurred, the hormones in your circulation shaped those thoughts, memories, and emotions and altered how sensitive your brain was to particular environmental stimuli. And in the preceding months to years, experience and environment changed how those neurons function, causing some to sprout new connections and become more excitable, and causing the opposite in others.” Further back, possibly decades, even more antecedent causes. During adolescence, a key brain region was still being constructed, shaped by socialization and acculturation. Further back, early childhood experiences shaped the construction of your brain and as well as the fetal environment before that. Even further back, you have to factor in the genes you inherited. Your childhood was massively influenced by culture which came from centuries of ecological factors that influenced what kind of culture your ancestors invented and evolutionary pressures that molded the species you belong to.

All of this you had little or no control over. You cannot decide all the sensory stimuli in your environment, your hormone levels, whether something traumatic happened to you in the past, the socioeconomic status of your parents, your fetal environment, your genes, whether your ancestors were farmers or herders.

In offering a counter argument he would accept, Sapolsky states, “Show me a neuron (or brain) whose generation of a behavior is independent of

the sum of its biological past, and for the purposes of this book, you've demonstrated free will."

Sapolsky also addresses the implications of accepting determinism over free will, suggesting that it could lead to a more compassionate society. If people recognized that behaviors are often the result of uncontrollable factors, there might be a shift in how blame, responsibility, and even praise are assigned. In the absence of free will, moral judgments become illogical and unjustifiable.

When it comes to a societal shift in understanding and reaction, Sapolsky reminds us that we have already been making steady progress along this same trajectory. He starts by reminding us that, once upon a time, when the village was hit by a hailstorm, it was assumed that someone had enacted a curse on the village and the old, toothless lady at the edge of the village was burned at the stake. For thousands of years, if a person was to collapse and convulse in a seizure, it was assumed that the individual was possessed and they had to be burned as well. Fast forward to more recent times and consider what was too long considered the cause of schizophrenia, schizophrenogenic mothering, mothering so bad that all the child could do was retreat into schizophrenic delusions and fantasy. Similarly, autism was of course the fault of "refrigerator mothers." Or consider the child who struggled in school, especially with reading, and kept reversing letters; they were considered lazy and unmotivated. In all these cases, when a better understanding of the predicament was obtained, fault and personal responsibility were subtracted from the equation and the world became a better place.

All these shifts seem quite logical in hindsight and the previous perspective seems a bit outrageous. But shifting to a perspective of no free will seems much more implausible. So, how many decisions am I making daily, none? When I walk into an ice-cream shop was that a choice or

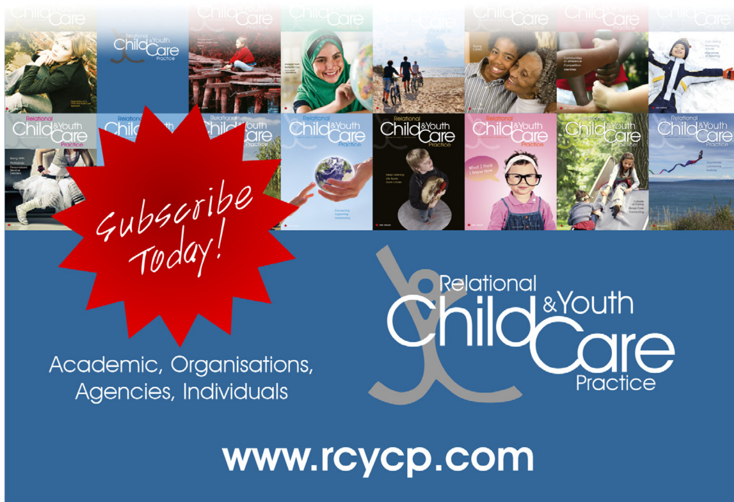
“determined?” Which ice-cream flavor? Is that not a choice we make? I am quite curious about how someone came to be the person that chooses vanilla ice cream – everyone else knows they should have picked Rocky Road! My wife says this is actually strong evidence for her. She doesn’t “choose vanilla” - it is a biological, psychological reaction, shaped many years ago by her father who was always making homemade “vanilla” ice cream. With all those cherished memories held tightly by a plethora of synapsis, there is no choice to be made. There you go Dr. Sapolsky further evidence!

In “The Vocation of Man,” (1800), Johann Gottlieb Fichet says, “you could not remove a single grain of sand from its place without thereby… changing something throughout all parts of the immeasurable whole.” Most might be more familiar with the idea of the “butterfly effect.” It is fascinating to consider the immeasurable cascade of factors and events that led to who anyone of us might be. As a dear friend phrased, “How the stage was set for our lives.” And once who you are is determined, there is the infinite flow of possibilities to determine who you might become. Sapolsky is not proposing this is “predetermined,” but instead “determined” by this flow of influences – each new day, there is an immeasurable number of possible outcomes. I have generally compartmentalized the outcome of decisions I’ve made to the immediate or adjacent context. For example, decisions I made regarding education influenced my vocation and decisions I made regarding employment influenced future employment and vocational and professional pursuits. However, those early decisions determined everything else. A choice in education not only determined my subsequent vocation, but where I lived, who I married, my children. If I think back on what I thought were decisions and contemplate the possibility of them having been “determined” by previous causes, it gets even more interesting.

For the sake of a thinking exercise, accept for a moment that the extreme is true – we don't make choices. We are the subject of our biology, environment, and experiences. A strong element of our environment and experiences is our relationships. Do our relationships (others) then shape us more strongly than we shape ourselves? Is it possible then that we could bear more responsibility for each other than for ourselves?

Think then how this understanding might relate to relational CYC practice. It may or may not alter the approach or components, but, regardless, it underscores its importance.

MARK STROTHER is Chief Operating Officer at Cal Farley's Boys Ranch, Texas, USA, and a member of the CYC-Net Board of Governors.



Postcard from Leon Fulcher

From New Zealand Celebrating Auroa Australis & SailGP Regatta

Kia Ora Katau Katoa and warm greetings everyone!

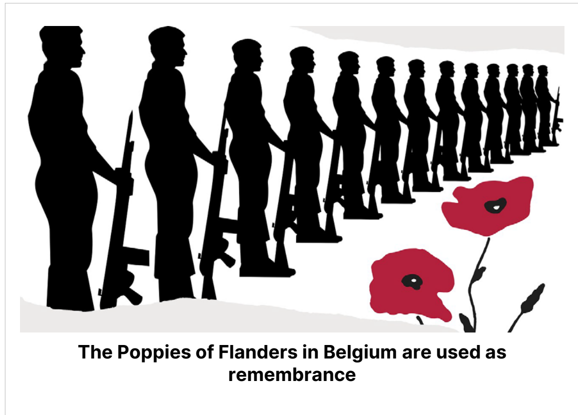
Happy International Child and Youth Care Week! 25 April is a National Day of Commemoration in Australia and New Zealand for victims of war and for recognition of the role of their armed forces. It marks the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War.

ANZAC Day is a New Zealand time of remembrance for fallen soldiers

ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. The soldiers in those forces became known as ANZACs. Anzac Day is a commemoration of the anniversary of the landing of Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli, Turkey on 25 April in 1915. When Great Britain declared war against Germany for its invasion of Belgium in 1914, Australia and New

Zealand, as Dominions within the British Empire, regarded themselves automatically also at war.

At dawn on 25 April 1915, the first of approximately 70,000 soldiers from the Allies landed at Gallipoli. Their aim was to capture the Dardanelles, the gateway to the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. The objective was to drive through to Istanbul, take Turkey out of the war and to provide supplies to Russia in its fight against Germany. What was planned as a bold stroke became a stalemate after the invading troops failed to reach their objective on the first day.



The Poppies of Flanders in Belgium are used as remembrance

For the next eight months they clung to the land they had captured, eventually withdrawing at the end of 1915. At the end of the campaign, Gallipoli was still held by its Turkish defenders. After both sides had suffered heavy casualties, the Allied forces were evacuated,

Monuments of Remembrance are found in every rural community, town, and suburb

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with estimates of 8,700 Australian and 2,700 New Zealanders were killed. New Zealanders have commemorated the Gallipoli landings ever since and Anzac Day has been a public holiday since 1921.

Crosses of Remembrance are set out at the Auckland Museum in memory of locals

In 1949 those who fell in the South African and Second World wars were included. Now the day honours all New Zealanders who have served in wars overseas with people gathering to acknowledge the sacrifice of all those who have died in warfare, and the contribution and suffering of all those who have served.

War graves are marked in cemeteries and urupa throughout the country

Today there is talk of an 'Anzac tradition', meaning the ideals of courage, endurance and comradeship that are still relevant to this day. In 1917–18, the nation's attention was firmly focused on the Western Front in Europe – a

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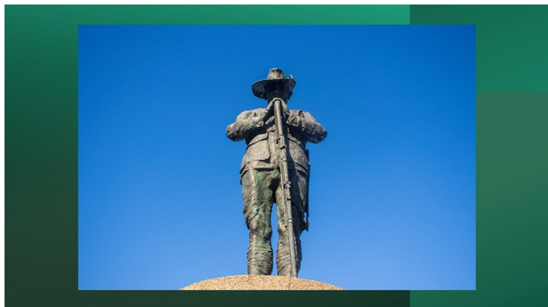
campaign of much greater significance and one that would ultimately claim almost five times as many New Zealand lives as Gallipoli.

The Returned Service Agency fund raises through community poppy sales

Anzac Day is a time to remember the many more who returned home and acknowledge their struggles and achievements in post-war society. We should also remember those at home who have supported, endured, or opposed wars, and reflect on our hopes for a world in which all people can share in a sense of peace, security, and wellbeing.



The so-called Great War of WWI took the country's youngest and finest

The so-called 'war to end all wars' – as WW I was known – failed to teach the world its lessons about mass destruction, intense pain, and suffering. In 2024, ANZAC Day Remembrance Gatherings will also give pause to remember thousands killed in warfare activities in Sudan, Gaza, and

Myanmar amongst other warfare activities. Those who pursue warfare give little consideration for the lives of children or young people whose injuries and deaths are seen as collateral damage.

The mass killing of Gaza children shows how little the world has learned about war

Sadly, national vetoes by one permanent member or another ensures that the United Nations Security Council is unable to stop warfare as the UN founders envisaged. The World needs this!

Leon

Information

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