

CYC-Online

e-journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net)



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

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Loneliness and Child & Youth Care Practice

Thom Garfat

In February of 2018 the British Broadcasting Corporation conducted the BBC Loneliness Experiment which involved over 55,000 participants between the ages of 16 and 99. It was a voluntary experiment and involved people from around the globe (You can see some of the fascinating results [here](#)). While there were some connections made between social media and young people's (age 16-24) experience of loneliness, which was more pronounced than in older people, I do not want you to think this is an old guy rant about the evils of social media. Indeed, some of the reasons suggested by the researchers for the degree of loneliness experienced by younger people were (a) their lack of previous experiences with loneliness and (b) the tendency of young people to have more intensive experiences to and new (to them) feelings. These findings also suggest that this intensity of experience among young people is not new, as even the older participants identified that the loneliest period of their lives was when they were younger.

However, reading into the study offers some interesting 'noticings'. For example:



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- People who feel discriminated against are likely to feel lonelier.
- People who feel lonely have, on average, a lower level of trust in others.
- Loneliness and being alone are not the same – people can feel loneliness even in a group.

So, reading this study caused me to reflect on my/our work with young people and whether we think about their potential loneliness. I must confess that while I have thought about the lack of connections in young people's lives, I have not really considered, let alone focused on, their experience of loneliness itself. In some ways, this highlights the importance of noticing the difference between engagement and connection. While one can be engaged with many people, in the absence of connection, one might still experience loneliness.

One of the most common ideas for elevating loneliness suggested by participants was, simply, to have a conversation with someone – nothing deep or insightful, just a conversation, a connection, being with another person as human to human. A connection, not just an engagement, although the study did not specifically make this distinction using these words, we in the field know that connectedness is more than just a conversation.

As one searches the internet for 'responses to loneliness' many, many suggestions appear. However, sorted down they come to a few, seemingly simple, ideas:

- Engaging in activities with others
- Someone to connect with and talk to about one's experiences, especially 'negative' emotional experiences.



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- And, this, of course, got me to thinking of the Characteristics of Relational CYC Practice (<https://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/oct2018.pdf>) and how they might relate to this issue of loneliness in young people. As I went through the characteristics thinking about loneliness and responding to it, I notice how many of them spoke to the concerns re: responding to loneliness. For example, **meeting them where they are at** – noticing a young person’s loneliness and engaging with them in the context of knowing they are lonely. Tapping into our own experiences of loneliness, which we have all had, can situate us to connect with the loneliness experience of young people.
- **The purposeful use of activities** – engaging with young people in activities which open the opportunity to allow them to engage in safe intimacy and connection. We notice that engagement is not connection, but creates the context within which it might occur.
- **Being in relationship** – focusing on the ‘in-between between us’ – is it a place of loneliness or a place of connectedness? And how is it the same or different for each of those connecting?
- **Hanging out** – just being with other – being available, and just, simply, being there for other. Presence and availability may be the most direct way to address the feelings and dangers of loneliness and isolation.

Well, I could go on, and I invite you to do further wondering about loneliness and our approach.

So simple, yet so profound. Our way of ‘being in the world with other’ may offer a response to the potential loneliness of young people.



And the whole point here is this – perhaps we need to wonder about loneliness in the people with whom we engage – and act on what we discover in those wonderings.

As you read this September issue of CYC-Online, notice the theme and context of loneliness in the various columns. Jack Phelan describes the ever-changing boundary dynamics between youth and practitioner. Hans Skott-Myhre explores the impact of community standing up for one another. Kiaras Gharabaghi reflects on the central components of relational practice. Tara Collins writes about child rights and community. Theresa Fraser reminds us of breaking barriers to isolation in the school context – especially in moments of sharing breakfast. Lauren Akbar reminds us of the dangers of extreme loneliness and isolation and the value of love in our connections.

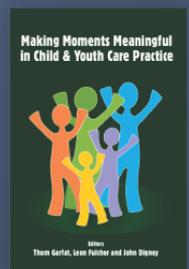
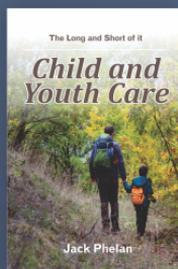
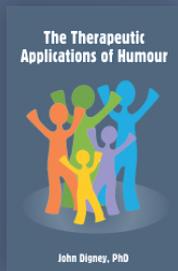
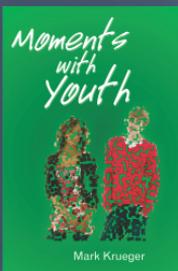
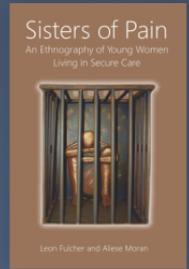
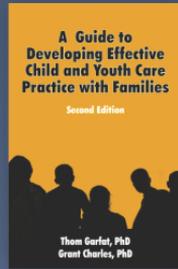
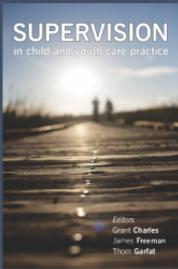
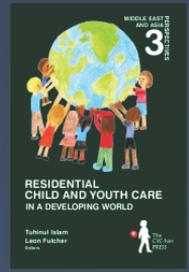
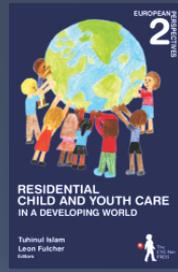
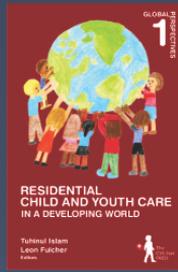
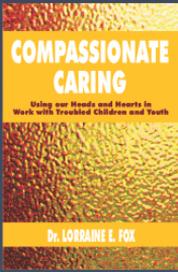
We did not set out to create or coordinate a series of writing on the theme of loneliness, yet the theme is ever-present in this issue.

By the way, In October of 2018, Prime Minister Theresa May appointed the world's first Minister of Loneliness. How awesome is that, eh?

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Re-Launching Child and Youth Care Practice

Kiaras Gharabaghi

The field of child and youth care has, over the past fifty years or so, made huge strides; it has expanded from its residential group care roots to cover a wide range of service sectors and professional activities. We have today a not insubstantial body of literature that provides for a strong conceptual foundation for understanding child and youth care practice as distinct from other human service activities and professions. Post-secondary education in child and youth care has grown to provide college diplomas, undergraduate and graduate degrees across several countries. Professional associations exist in many countries, and membership in these associations has grown (albeit it at not very impressive rates). A reliable schedule of conferences for practitioners and academics exist, some of which focus on local and regional issues and themes while others are provincial, national, or global in scope. All of these accomplishments are the result of the hard work and incredible commitment of small groups of child and youth care people who have taken leadership roles in making things happen. And all of this is good.

It is fair to say, however, that the field of child and youth care also presents some problems, some challenges, some disappointments and some frustrations. For one thing, many employers of child and youth care practitioners are not entirely pleased with what those practitioners are able to offer, not only in the context of substantive knowledge and skill, but also



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in the context of professional conduct, work ethic, and capacity to contribute to organizational growth and development. Child and youth care practitioner themselves complain that their career opportunities are inadequate, compensation is low, upward mobility difficult to operationalize, and respect amongst other professional groups is at best variable, but more often than not underwhelming.

Importantly, it is not all CYCs who feel that way; some are thriving, successful, upwardly mobile and enjoying increasing compensation for their efforts. And employers are not worried about all of their employees either. Most employers can point to some employees who meet and exceed their expectations, and whom they are grooming for leadership roles in their organizations. This then raises the question what it might take to be amongst the thriving CYCs, as opposed to amongst those concerned about their career prospects and whether or not the field can yield the rewarding work it seemed to promise.



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I think the field can indeed yield that work, and I don't think that rewarding work comes at the expense of other rewards, including compensation, living standards, access to leadership roles and more. Quite to the contrary, I think we may have made a mistake when we advertised our field as one not appropriate for those wanting to get rich. Or as one that fills the heart with richness but leaves the rent unpaid. Or even as one that is all about the young people we work with. But to get to a different, and in my view better version of our field, we may have to re-launch it. That process, broadly speaking, requires several core shifts in how we think about child and youth care, both as a field and as a career. I will list some of these shifts below, understanding that these are likely not the only ones that matter:

1. Let us not limit the description of our field to a few concepts and processes that come across as trivial and self-evident to the rest of the world, even though we may understand them to be quite profound and complex. By way of example, I think every time we say something like "child and youth care is all about relationships" we lose our non-CYC audience to whom this hardly sounds earthshattering. I think it was Fewster who many years ago wrote something along the lines of 'Talking about relationships is hardly congruent with our wild ambition to change the world'. Among other concepts that do us no good talking about, even if they are in fact important, are 'self care', 'wounded healers', 'child or youth-centered', 'voice', and many others. This may sound like an all out attack on the very essence of our field. But it is not. I don't question the substantive content of any of these concepts and I think many CYC scholars and practitioners have written and spoken wonderfully about each of these. The point is that these concepts



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don't sell; 'no one wants to pay for your self care'; 'if you're wounded, get help'; 'it is not useful, and perhaps harmful, to place the child or youth at the centre of bad practice – it is only useful to center them in good practice'; and 'what's with the constant reference to voice, which seems like a vehicle to get *your* voice heard rather than that of the young people'. Perhaps what we need is a description of our field that more directly engages the social dilemmas of the 21st century, and that places some urgency on our presence as essential in order to avoid catastrophe. For example, could we describe our field as '*a high-skilled intervention in community dis-regulation using catalytic social economies for rebuilding connection and growth*'? This is in fact what we do when we work with young people in relational practice to re-built relationships across families and communities, thereby building strength in people to re-engage civil society through work, play and social cohesion. But it doesn't sound as much like a minimum wage job, does it?

2. Let us move beyond the now well-established parameters of inter-personal connections in child and youth care practice and accept, and benefit from, the simple fact that the inter-personal exists within the social. In the 21st century, we are living witnesses to the transformation of the social space of humanity, as evidenced by everything from communication processes in the digital age to multiple identities in the age of post-binaries, and complex histories and presences set off by unprecedented migration flows across all socio-economic strata, porous borders and ecological globalism, and a resurgence of Indigenous rights and connections to the land. It is not viable to propose relevance and economic value for an activity that seeks to limit itself to the interpersonal



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space. For one thing, our postmodern surveillance systems combined with our incessant need to be heard, valued and nurtured, render the interpersonal impossible. A moment shared between two people but later described in a report, disseminated in an intranet of some agency, hacked by someone seeking to disrupt, and ultimately coopted by a political faction of the extreme right in an effort to perpetuate white power, is not really interpersonal. What we do, we do in a social space, transparent to communities, prepared for critical responses, and undoubtedly subject to feedback for its inadequacies from the perspectives of multiple communities representing a multitude of lived experiences.

3. Child & Youth Care practitioners cannot escape the need for innovation. It is not adequate to rely on old and tired structures, most of which are highly contested anyways, within which we provide some magical solutions to the many forms of oppression, marginalization, pathology, and disconnections suffered by the young people, and usually their families and their communities too. 50 years ago, it made sense to build our field within the structures of residential care, foster care, schools and hospitals. Our field was the innovation that was needed then. Professionals who were able to work through connecting with young people, focused on every day events and contexts, and ultimately strengthening young people's capacities to face conflict and opportunity in family and in community, did not exist back then. Today, that no longer makes any sense. Child and youth care practice in and of itself is not an innovation anymore. It is instead a taken-for-granted service provided to young people who exhaust the 'real' professional groups that are better paid and more highly valued precisely



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because they don't engage the young people themselves through relationship; they are too busy with more important stuff to worry about, such as the grade 2 curriculum, the latest diagnosis and treatment plan, or drafting the necessary documents to wrestle custody away from the young person's family. We need to reinvent ourselves as innovators, and I think we can do that only if we confront the structures, systems and processes that actually ensure our continued marginalization in the professional hierarchies of the human services. Innovation in child and youth care can only be found in community, and more specifically in our approaches to strengthening community through the building of social networks that are responsive not simply to psycho-social functioning needs of individual young people, but indeed to the economic, social, political and cultural power of the communities where we work.

These are just three shifts I think we might consider to re-launch our field. These shifts, dramatic as they may appear at first glance, do not require us to abandon anything we already have. All that amazing work done between the 1970s and the current time is still as relevant now as it was then. But it does require us to think beyond that work and to build ourselves as practitioners differently. Post-secondary institutions must play their role. We have to do better than relational pedagogy, which seems to mean nothing in particular or everything imaginable. What we really need is a commitment to our students to build their innovation skills, their confidence in their role to shape the 21st century in resistance to the current forces shaping it, and to reengage with young people as partners in global change, in the defense of democracy, and in the rebuilding of communities outside of institutional structures from a time long gone. Child and youth



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care practitioners must become economically relevant, politically fearsome, and the cultural vanguard of the coming age.

If we can engage this project, we will produce more child and youth care practitioners who will be able to build career pathways that don't compromise the quality of what they do with the quality of their lives. If we engage this project, we will forever bury the idea that child and youth care is a low-end, subsistence economy endeavour. And if we engage this project, we will transfer our ambitions for ourselves to our work with young people and to those young people, which means that we may well stop preparing those young people for minimum wage jobs and chronic poverty as we typically do now.

Ambitious? Yes, it is. Urgent? Yes, I think it is that too. A step toward aligning social justice and child and youth care practice? Well, I think that is the only future worth fighting for.

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ASPECTS OF RELATIONAL PRACTICE

Relational Child & Youth Care practice has been defined as “... a form of helping that ... attends to the co-constructed in-between of self and other” (Garfat, 2012, p.32).

We are aware that many practitioners are exploring and engaging in relational practice in critical and contextual ways and we would like to showcase how Relational Child & Youth Care (CYC) practice is being refined and expanded upon within, and throughout, our diverse communities and contexts of practice. While the literature on Relational CYC Practice has grown over the past few years, we want to return to this central idea and open it up further based on thinking and experiences over the past few years.

The journal *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* (RCYCP) is preparing a special issue on ‘*Aspects of Relational CYC Practice*’. We are interested in submission that explore/engage in aspects of relational practice in the following areas, however, we are not limited to these:

- Working alongside various populations/communities; how aspects of relational practice may vary due to the contexts, histories and systems that impact a person’s experience and relational practice;
- Moving from theory to practice – examining and reconceiving aspects of relational practice (ex. relational safety, relational engagement, relational versus relationship-based practice, relational interventions, etc.);
- Aspects of Relational CYC Practice in the various areas of our field – practice, teaching, training, supervision, family work, school-based CYC, etc.
- Practice definitions / descriptions of relational Child & Youth Care practice as it continues to evolve.

Submissions for this issue may include various formats such as full-length papers, research, or short narratives and we prefer them to be less than 5000 words. Information for authors can be found on our website www.rcycp.com

Deadline for Submissions: October 5, 2019

If you are interested in contributing to this issue, please contact: rcycp@press.cyc-net.org

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Boundary Dynamics for Relational CYC Practitioners

Jack Phelan

After CYC practitioners have experienced about a year of life space work, they typically become able to create comfortable personal safety and competence beliefs, which now translates into the capability to be other-focused and relationally ready to engage with others in a deliberate way.

Prior to this juncture, in the later months of their first year of experience, they can start to reduce the thicker boundaries which have protected both themselves and the people being supported, by beginning to have more fun moments by relaxing program guidelines as well as demonstrating caring behaviors that go beyond job description tasks.

Now this more “other-focused” practitioner can begin to establish the inter-personal in-between (Garfat, 2008) where relational practice occurs. The initial efforts to do this will be awkward and gradually the skills of relational CYC work will get refined. The usual learning curve for developing good relational skills is about two years. Boundary awareness is a major ingredient in relational practice and it is at this point in one’s career when the thick boundaries which were so useful and safe have to shift into a more personal and flexible closeness.

Basically, the relational practitioner needs to build a willingness in the person being supported to become more open and vulnerable by creating a closer connection and developing trust. The people we try to support are



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not comfortable with being close to others, based on their experiences of trauma and abuse. Therefore, the relational practitioner must demonstrate both trust and vulnerability in order to expect it in return. This requires the CYC worker to have very clear boundaries that are based on building connection without becoming too threatening or too easily maneuvered into unsafe interactions. Supervisors are crucial in this transition to relational approaches, and boundary issues become a major focus for discussion.

One key area for boundary discussions is the willingness to reduce the need for control, and the transfer of control to the other person. Connection that just results in more advice, direction and awareness of deficits is not the goal, and this type of connection will be quickly rejected. The eventual target of relational interactions is to create an equality of influencing, where both parties feel listened to and respected. Just as the goal of the CYC practitioner is to build a willingness in the other person to be open to influence and learning, we also must be open to being influenced by the other person.

Life space dynamics greatly facilitate relational connection building, since much of the time is spent co-experiencing life events which can create opportunities for connection, discovery and empowerment (Krueger, 2004). There are countless opportunities during the day for relational CYC practitioners to highlight moments that invite connection and close interaction. Well timed, unthreatening closeness will gradually establish the inter-personal in-between space where relational work occurs. This more intimate one-to-one closeness is not facilitated by a behaviorally focused, regimented program activity, but can be skillfully created even inside these impersonal interactions through boundary dynamics that demonstrate caring and openness. Relational practice is



often done without the constrictor or support of behavioral program guidelines, since it is more personal.

The overall intent of relational practice is to reduce the ego-centric logic of the youth/family member, which has been constructed over many years of experiencing abuse and neglect, because until the youth/family member becomes more “other-aware” there will be no logical reason to care about other people. Building a relationship which creates closeness that is safe and comforting, instead of threatening, will gradually lead to a need to learn how to maintain connections by being considerate of others. This basic social logic is a crucial ingredient in the developmental journey that our youth and family members must desire to learn to become more successful in their lives.

Boundary dynamics that are continually being assessed and adapted by skilled practitioners are the key to building the desire to have closer connections to others.

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JACK PHELAN is a regular contributor to CYC-Online. He is the author of *Intentional CYC Supervision: A Developmental Approach* and *Child and Youth Care: The Long and Short of It*, both available through the CYC-Net Press. Jack teaches Child and Youth Care at Grant MacEwan College in Alberta, Canada. Learn more at <https://cyc-net.org/People/people-phelan.html>



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Of Dreaming Wild Dogs: Singing Up

Hans Skott-Myhre

I have been giving a lot of thought recently to the question of individuality and collectivity. Like most of you, I live within a dominant societal construct that values the individual over the group. The rugged male individual is particularly valued and I have spent much of my youth and adulthood striving to emulate those values. The term rugged individualism was coined by U.S. president Herbert Hoover and is defined as the self-reliance and independence of each citizen.

It is echoed in a recent re-writing of the plaque at the Statue of Liberty by the Trump administration's acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Kevin Cuccinelli. Cuccinelli stated that the current wording of the poem at base of the iconic symbol of immigration to the U.S, should be changed from, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" to "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge." This driving impetus towards those who ostensibly need no help, can stand on their own two feet, and strive always toward their own betterment is deeply embedded in the consciousness of neoliberal capitalist subjects. Of course, it is a discourse of contradictions, in which we are told to be open about our "weaknesses" such as struggles with depression, drug or alcohol dependency, inability to share our emotions, health and physical challenges, and so on. However, the expectation is that we will not



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succumb to these impediments in our path towards self-actualization. We will get counseling, take medications, exercise, eat properly, do yoga, take remedial classes and monitor our progress on our watches, cell phones, social media platforms so we can see our struggles graphed and numerated. We can see how well we are doing and show others, while competing for the trophy of most improved, most actualized, most obstacles overcome, and earn the approbation of a largely anonymous audience of clicks and claps on our Facebook page.

There was a recent article in the New York Times by Kim Brooks entitled, "[We Have Ruined Childhood.](#)" I generally shy away from articles with titles like this because, on the whole, they tend to be accounts of moral panic that blame cell phones, video games and social media for stealing childhood. I was pleasantly surprised that Brooks didn't do this. While she certainly acknowledged the pervasiveness of social and virtual media in young people's lives, she argues that this is an effect, not a cause. Her argument is, that the reason young people are being drawn to media as central defining characteristic of their social world, is that the actual time available for real time connection with other living things is being significantly eroded by the overscheduling of young people's lives. She notes that,

No longer able to rely on communal structures for child care or allow children time alone, parents who need to work are forced to warehouse their youngsters for long stretches of time. School days are longer and more regimented. Kindergarten, which used to be focused on play, is now an academic training ground for the first grade. Young children are assigned homework even though numerous studies have found it harmful. STEM, standardized testing and active-shooter drills have largely replaced recess, leisurely lunches, art and music. (Brooks, 2019)



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In a world of childhood driven by the incessant neoliberal imperative to “care” for the self through ceaseless activity and training, there is simply very little time to build functioning systems of relational or communal care. It is far easier and less time consuming to turn on a video game, text someone, share a photo, or click “like,” than it is to take the time to hang out and get to know someone. That process, so central to what we do in CYC, is actually quite challenging within the world of 21st century childhood. Put simply, building relationships take loads of free time with very limited sets of expectations as to what will happen during that time. I think about this when I hear us talking about driving our programs by outcomes, evidenced based programming, and behavioral interventions.

Fortunately, young people are ahead of us in understanding the perils of this 21st century neo-liberal world. They understand that the incessant and competitive structuring of their lives is toxic and that the solution is down time in face to face interactions with each other. They have begun to log off social media platforms. In a recent piece in the Guardian, “[Logged off: Meet the teens who refuse to use social media](#),” it was noted that,

A desire to build authentic, offline friendships motivated some to quit. “I’m so much better at real-life socialising now,” says Amanuel. “Not just those people you accept on a friend request who are friends of a friend.” (Kale, 2018)

This refusal of the drive to compete as an individual on social media, to put living relationships ahead of the ever proliferating fields of the rugged individualistic call to *be all you can be*, reminded me of an event that also occurred recently in [Nashville, Tennessee](#). The U.S. immigration service had trapped an undocumented man and his wife in their van, which was in their driveway. They were demanding that the couple come out of the van so they could be taken into custody. The authorities even threatened to take their children into custody, who were in the adjacent house, unless



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the couple surrendered. And then something remarkable happened. The neighbors heard and saw what was happening and formed a human chain encircling the van. Over the four hours of the confrontation, neighbors brought food and water to the couple. They filled their gas tank so they could keep the air conditioning running. They alerted local politicians and police who came to investigate. The neighbors held hands as a human chain of care until the immigration agents gave up and left. The explanation the neighbors gave for their behavior was that the undocumented couple and their family, "work every day, they come home.... The kids jump on their trampoline; it's just a community."

It's just a community. Simple words with profound implications in this 21st century world of each person for themselves. The assertion of a collective that cares, even in the face of possible legal force, is an assertion of the primacy of relationship. The remarkable actions of these neighbors were not founded in a perception that the undocumented couple were extraordinary, exemplary, that their kids were acing their school testing, or even that the parents were heroic. What the neighbors said, was that these people were deserving of care on the basis of living, working and playing in a community. In CYC we often note the importance of play in our work. In this case, when asked the reason for going up against a powerful state agency, the neighbor replied that the couple's daughter jumped on the trampoline. The power of the collective is to be found in just such idiosyncratic resonances of what we hold in common. We play, we work, we look out for each other, we are a community. As I reflect on this, I wonder if there is something for us to learn about the communities of care in our agencies and programs. Do we focus so much on the individual progress of each young person in our care, that we lose sight of how we are building community in what we do together?



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As I was reading about the community action in Tennessee, I was also reading a rather remarkable book by Deborah Rose Bird called [Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction](#) about the relations between aboriginal peoples in Australia and the wild dogs called dingoes. Bird writes about the deep ecological connections and resonances between animals and human beings in understanding questions of how we understand love and death. She writes about the ruthless campaign by pastoralists (white ranchers and farmers) to eliminate the dingo as a pest. She connects the attacks on the wild dogs to similar campaigns against aboriginal peoples, as well as to the escalating pattern of species extinction globally. She explicates the deep eco-spiritual connection between aboriginal peoples and the dingoes. In particular she writes about an aboriginal elder called Old Tim.

Old Tim was Mad about his dogs. They laughed at his attachment to his dogs, and at the number of dogs in his entourage (sometimes claimed to be a hundred or more). Old Tim didn't seem to mind being laughed at; he loved his dogs and respected them. His animal kin were dingoes, so he was a dog man, and was deeply committed to his dogs. ([Rose, 2013](#))

Bird argues that the colonial legacy of being able to kill with impunity, as in the genocidal attacks on dingoes and Native Peoples, the European Holocaust, our assault on other species globally is disconnecting the inheritors of that legacy from life itself and from the rich tapestry of interconnections that sustains us. The commitment to a kinship between humans and more than human others for elders such as Old Tim is a refusal of a profound sense of alienation that Bird tells us is creating our world as ever more lonely.

As I read about this, I couldn't help but think about those of us in CYC who are mad about young people, particularly wild young people who many others may see as pests. Perhaps, we are a bit like Old Tim and his dogs. People laugh at us for "wasting our time" on the "losers" of the



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neoliberal race to the top. While it might seem a bit of loose connection to put young people and dingoes in the same category, I wonder how different it really is. Of course, we know that there have been mass shootings of street kids in Brazil by the police who wanted to remove them as pests. And one could argue there may well be a campaign to shoot to kill young Black men in the U.S. But the campaign to eliminate the dingoes also includes poisoning. Certainly, a case can be made for the poisoning of marginalized and disenfranchised children biologically, as in toxic water supplies, cancer from industrial pollutants, and starvation globally. In addition, one could argue we are poisoning the social environment as well, with toxic discourses of hate, fear, and alienation that turn our young people against each other and themselves in epidemics of suicide and mass shootings.

So what are we to do if we are the Old Tim's of young people? If Tim is a dog man and deeply committed to his dogs through a sense of kinship, are we kid people? Are we as deeply committed through deep affiliative ties of kinship with the young people we encounter? If so, we may want to consider demonstrating that affiliation by engaging in an aboriginal tradition described by [Freya Mathews](#) called singing up. Singing up is a form of what Bird calls eco-reconciliation. That is a "way of living generously with others, singing up relationships so that we all flourish." Mathews take the aboriginal practice and offers it as way for Western people's to re-engage their world in deep relationship. In the aboriginal tradition there is a singing up the country in order to

give life a charge, a boost, a call of care and connection. Singing up is relational; it communicates the fact that people are participating in the webs of life . . . Singing up expresses powerful connectivities founded in knowledge, recognition, care, and love. ([Mathews, 2000](#))



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It is a practice we aspire to in CYC in that it is an ethical way to engage with others through joyful intentional caring. To me it seems that the neighbors in Tennessee sang up the community. They expressed a living connectivity with those living among them. If we are “kid people” in the way that Old Tom was a dog man, then we ought to be exploring how we sing up our kinship with young people. Perhaps the question we should be asking is a question Bird poses in relation to all living things. “Whether we are able to love the others enough to save them.”

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Relational Practice in Child and Youth Care Theory

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Lately I have been spending a lot of time reading papers written by CYC students for their undergraduate and graduate capstone projects, and as it so happens, I have also been spending quite a bit of time in the field visiting with CYCs where they work. And no matter what I read or what I hear in conversations with practitioners, the phrase 'relational practice', is ever-present. I suppose this is a good thing; we have worked pretty hard to get to this phrase as a way of defining the core of our practice, and so it is good that people are using it. Not so good is that the phrase is being used in all kinds of different ways, and more often than not, it has very little to do with relational practice. This month, I just want to provide a refresher on the many different ways in which we have linguistically dealt with the issue of 'relationship' and why relational practice is not the same, and not interchangeable, with other ways of using the word 'relationship' in various grammatical forms. My perspective on relational practice is of course only one perspective; there are others, both within child and youth care theory and in other fields of practice and thought, such as social work, cultural studies, philosophy and early childhood studies. Nevertheless, here is one way of distinguishing phrases and words we often use as if they were all the same.



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A long time ago, everyone in child and youth care spoke of 'having relationships' with young people. We can see this phrase in many of the writings of scholars such as Redl, Bettelheim, and certainly also Aichhorn and even Korzcak. Practitioners often made reference to having a 'good' relationship with a particular young person (many still say things like this). But at some point, we started thinking more deeply about what it means to 'have relationships' with young people, and we realized that this phrase really is based on a profoundly materialist orientation toward being with others. 'Having' implies ownership; having relationships implies that those spaces occupied by 'us and them' (practitioner and young person) are essentially a matter of property. Furthermore, we realized that 'having relationships' and then labelling these as good or bad does not quite do justice to the complexity of connections between people. Perhaps relationships are good for one party and terrible for the other party; whose perspective gets to define the quality of relationship? And finally, the commodification of relationship embedded in this use of language also lends itself to a utilitarian approach to the role of relationship: "I have a good relationship with Abdul, and therefore, I can get him to do his chores." In this construction, having relationships really is little more than yet another tool of manipulation, a means to an end, a one way street in which the property owner enjoys the privileges of coercive, but hegemonic in the Gramscian¹ sense, power.

At some point, we moved away from talking about having relationships (at least in theory) and replaced this with 'relationship-based practice'. This move really was a significant innovation that changed the way we thought

¹ Antonio Gramsci, leader of the Italian Communist Party during the 1920, argued that 'hegemony' is a cultural system of oppression that fascists use exceptionally well by convincing the masses that their oppression is good for them (slight simplification of what is a very complex argument).



about the role of relationship in child and youth care. The term 'relationship-based practice' centers a practice that is distinct from relationship itself, but that is based on, or informed by, the consequences of relationship in our interactions with young people. The good thing about this use of language was that it allowed us to focus on our *practice* beyond relationship. Relationship-based practice promotes the idea that although relationship as a concept continues to be a central element of child and youth care practice, it is not *all* that there is to it; there is in fact a practice of child and youth care that stands apart from relationship itself, even if it is heavily influenced by it. This seemed to resolve the issue of commodifying relationship, or even of using relationship as a tool of manipulation. The problem with this phrase, however, became apparent very quickly when we then started asking just how our practice is based on relationship. It turned out that this was far too difficult a question, and the only possible response was to return to *having relationships* as the foundation for then engaging in some sort of practice with young people. This became slightly catastrophic in practice, because it implied that one needed to first develop a relationship with young people before any useful practice could take place. In many settings, this meant that young people resisting relationship with practitioners became labeled as problematic, hopeless, and disturbed, since they couldn't even get to a point of having a relationship with a practitioner (who was not usually willing to co-own the property of relationship anyways). Many racialized and Indigenous young people suffered the consequences of this approach, since their mistrust of especially white practitioners was based not on the nature of the interaction but on much broader and all-encompassing historical and on-going violences.



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Then came Garfat. I am not really sure if Garfat invented the next uses of language, but I attribute these to him. Garfat wasn't overly interested in 'having relationships', as this requires a focus on property management for which he felt far too irresponsible. Instead, Garfat was, and continues to be, interested in 'moments', preferably everyday, mundane, lived moments. He wanted to ensure that when practitioners encounter young people, the moment of encounter already represented the first occasion of 'making moments meaningful'. That first moment of encounter holds all the potential embedded in connection, relationship, reflection, and meaning-making (to be fair, some credit to Krueger as well). That moment is in fact child and youth care practice, and everything that follows is, in the first instance, a re-run of that first moment. In order to make this idea stick, Garfat needed a new language to talk about relationship. And so he introduced the language of 'being in relationship'. The practice associated with this language is that of being, as an action, not a noun. This is really a very challenging concept of relationship, because it asks of practitioners to do a lot while being. In fact, it asks of practitioners to consciously reflect on their being at a given moment, *in context* – context includes everything from the institutional context to the social, economic, political and identity context, to the context of history, power, bias, and ecological noise. And it asks practitioners to remove themselves from defining the context of the young person – it is for the young person to define their own context, and therefore to find their own way of being in relationship. Child and youth care practice then becomes that moment of being together, connected, with each party to the relationship both differentiating themselves from the other and simultaneously looking for common ground. The goal is to make meaning of the moment and contemplate its potential; it doesn't matter whether the moment (previously the relationship) is labeled as



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good or bad. Meaning can be made of the moment in the absence of judging its quality.

Being in relationship was a brilliant language game. But it was complicated and never really took off amongst practitioners. Plus it doesn't make it easy to form grammatically correct sentences: "So the other day I met Farideh and we were being in relationship when the phone rang." Awkward, to say the least! The other problem associated with being in relationship is that it may ask too much of the practitioner. Given the complexities of intersecting identities, racism, Indigenous world views, gender fluidity, and huge variations of ability/disability, being in relationship in context is hard to do, and doing it wrong or out of context is dangerous. So we needed something else, and Garfat was just the guy to deliver it.

Let's be clear; the phrase relational practice is not unique to child and youth care, and Garfat didn't invent it. It appears in other professional disciplines, but also in various poems, literature, and even music. But I give credit to Garfat for making this the new language of child and youth care practice, and for using this phrase to do two things at once: first, to render the noun relationship as adjective describing a practice, and secondly, to render the practice not based on relationship (the noun) but interdependent with relationship. Unlike relationship-based practice, the practice isn't simply based on some idea about relationship and then does its own thing moving forward; in relational practice, there is no practice unless it is somehow connected to relationship. The practice merges with relationship to give us relational practice.

In 2008, Garfat contributed what I consider to be the most useful chapter ever to a collection of essays edited by Bellefeuille and Ricks² (a

² G. Bellefeuille, & F. Ricks (Eds.) (2008). *Standing on the Precipice: Inquiry Into the Creative Potential of Child and Youth Care Practice*. Edmonton, AB: MacEwan Press.



book that everyone should own). It was arguably the most awkwardly titled chapter ever: “The Inter-Personal In-Between...”; but it provides the foundation for understanding what is meant by relational practice, and how this is different from having relationships, relationship-based practice, and being in relationship. Why it took 30 pages to make the point is beyond me, but here it is in a nutshell: Having relationships, relationship-based practice and being in relationship center the parties to the relationship – usually the practitioner and the young person.

Relational practice centers the *relationship in the moment* itself. The parties to that relationship are not really that important; the moments through which the relationship journeys are, however, loaded with meaning, and exploring that meaning holds enormous potential for healing and empowering experiences for both young person and practitioner. It even holds potential for healing for the land, the space, and the institution.

So, let me summarize all of this by making several pronouncements that I hope will be useful for anyone who has inadvertently used these various phrases interchangeably:

1. If you start a sentence with “I have a relationship with so and so”, you are not engaged in relational practice; you are instead engaged in property ownership and you have successfully commodified both your practice and the young person.
2. If in your practice, your thinking starts with yourself and then works toward thinking about the other, you are not engaged in relational practice. You are instead centering yourself (as the holder of power and coercive force), rendering the young person as secondary (as the other) and constructing the relationship in accordance with all of the power dynamics and affiliated consequences, including



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racism, gender normative ideologies and ableism, already present in your social environment.

3. If, on the other hand, you approach a moment of encounter with curiosity and a firm understanding that you don't really know what this moment means, you create the possibility of discovering that meaning together with a young person, and then you can each decide what to do with it as you see fit. It is the connection around that moment you share with the young person that has you engaged in relational practice.

There you have it. No matter what you get out of this column, I hope you will avoid using these various terms and phrases interchangeably going forward.

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ASPECTS OF RELATIONAL PRACTICE

Relational Child & Youth Care practice has been defined as “... a form of helping that ... attends to the co-constructed in-between of self and other” (Garfat, 2012, p.32).

We are aware that many practitioners are exploring and engaging in relational practice in critical and contextual ways and we would like to showcase how Relational Child & Youth Care (CYC) practice is being refined and expanded upon within, and throughout, our diverse communities and contexts of practice. While the literature on Relational CYC Practice has grown over the past few years, we want to return to this central idea and open it up further based on thinking and experiences over the past few years.

The journal *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* (RCYCP) is preparing a special issue on '*Aspects of Relational CYC Practice*'. We are interested in submission that explore/engage in aspects of relational practice in the following areas, however, we are not limited to these:

- Working alongside various populations/communities; how aspects of relational practice may vary due to the contexts, histories and systems that impact a person's experience and relational practice;
- Moving from theory to practice – examining and reconceiving aspects of relational practice (ex. relational safety, relational engagement, relational versus relationship-based practice, relational interventions, etc.);
- Aspects of Relational CYC Practice in the various areas of our field – practice, teaching, training, supervision, family work, school-based CYC, etc.
- Practice definitions / descriptions of relational Child & Youth Care practice as it continues to evolve.

Submissions for this issue may include various formats such as full-length papers, research, or short narratives and we prefer them to be less than 5000 words. Information for authors can be found on our website www.rcycp.com

Deadline for Submissions: October 5, 2019

If you are interested in contributing to this issue, please contact: rcycp@press.cyc-net.org

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Children's Rights and the South African Child and Youth Care & Youth Conferences

Tara Collins

Social media has been buzzing about the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) 22nd Biennial & 4th CYC-NET World Conference 2019 in Durban from July 2-4, 2019 (<http://www.naccw.org.za/conference-videos>). This was an extraordinary gathering of approximately 1400 Child and Youth Care (CYC) actors from across South Africa and the world. After hearing about this special NACCW and CYC-Net experience for years, it was exciting to attend for the first time alongside another first-timer whom I met: Josephine from Zimbabwe had waited 16 years for her turn to attend the conference and finally got her chance. In addition, I had the fantastic opportunity to attend as a chaperone the 9th NACCW Youth Conference that began on June 28 and continued until July 4. From across South Africa, about 140 young people from across South Africa gathered at a nature reserve and continued their work in Durban. There was so much valuable learning and dialogue at both these events. This column will focus on children's rights dimensions of these experiences.



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What were some dimensions related to children's rights at these significant CYC events?

1. Human rights are about respect

During the youth conference on the nature reserve, I shared dinner one night with several boys from Port Elizabeth. They were surprised when I said that Canada can learn from South Africa including the fact that Canadian children don't know about children's rights. When asked why are these rights are important, these boys shared that rights are because: then they know when they are violated; and then it means that they shouldn't have to do too many chores and be a slave. One of these same boys later shared his powerful story with the practitioner conference. Teachers abused him and other children treated as if he wasn't a human being. Thankfully, CYCs have positive roles in his life, making a big difference. He reminded everyone how children's rights are essentially about respecting every child and all children's humanity. Everyone deserves to have due regard for who they are as a human being.

2. The role of the arts and the rights to expression and culture are integral to child rights

The youth conference celebrated young people's songs, dance and culture reflected in different languages and ethnicities at various points. The practitioner conference also included much singing and dancing during breaks, which I believe reflects the role of songs and singing as community builders (and played a major role during the anti-apartheid movement). Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is certainly affirmed in its inclusion of "the right of the child...to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" and how these elements are integral to all aspects of children's rights. Young people contributing to a 'Shaking the



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Movers' conference of young people in 2013 in Canada also recognized the significance of the right to artistic expression and play in this CRC provision. (See http://www.landonpearson.ca/uploads/6/0/1/4/6014680/draft_4_-_stm_report-4.pdf.) It is necessary that adults recognize and support young people's communications beyond traditional means of words, speeches and writing. We must be aware of, and receptive to all of their contributions – artistic and otherwise.

3. Provision of rights can't be ignored for young people or those who care for them

In a country where 50% of the population lives below the poverty line, we must be mindful of the reality that some South African young people may not have all the belongings identified as required on a list of what to bring to Youth Conference. In addition, CYCs need stipends in order to have the basic requirements to live despite the critique from the Deputy Minister of Social Development at the practitioner conference plenary about the CYC concern for stipends. South African Human Rights Commissioner Ms. Matlhodi Angelina (Angie) Makwetla said to the plenary that we need to hold young people's hands and make resources available.

4. Every child has a right to participate and express themselves

The youth conference participants innovated and advanced a new system of voting for their representation on the NACCW. It was exciting to watch democracy in action to ensure that their priorities advanced. They also gave much to think about during their formal contribution during a practitioner plenary session that identified numerous concerns and issues that they are dealing with including poverty, teenage pregnancy, depression, suicide, drug abuse, domestic violence, overcrowding in schools and dropping out, and the importance of child participation.



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Sanele Khoza is a young person from the province of KwaZulu-Natal who shared his story during the opening plenary, highlighting how the Isibindi program in Safe Parks cared for him where the CYCs showed him love, parented him, accommodated him, and importantly believed in him and encouraged him. Now he is an accomplished actor. As the young people from North West region pointed out in a July 4 plenary: “My background doesn’t determine my future.” CYCs play an critical role in supporting young people to realize this essential point.

While it is valuable to have the young people’s contributions to the practitioner event, I couldn’t help but notice the division between the two events felt very rigid at times. The two events were distanced from each other physically and geographically, and they had limited contact with each other. There is value in having separate spaces at the same event/venue through planning so that the young people have sessions and activities that interest and cater to them. However, it is unfortunate that interactions with practitioners didn’t really occur as young people were bussed in for their limited contributions and presentations to the practitioner conference and then had to return to their youth event. In fact, the youth identified their interest as they put forward a motion to the practitioner conference requesting for a single event. It was voted down in plenary by the practitioners and referred to the National Executive Committee. Adults want their own space too. Moving forward as a community, we need to think about how we accommodate both the needs and legitimate desires of both the practitioners and young people.

I wonder about the lost potential of dialogue, which couldn’t really happen either formally or informally between the young people and practitioners. What learning could have happened then?



In order to do this, we should follow the advice of the young people to the practitioner conference on July 4 when they said: “Close your mouth, open your ears, and speak with your heart.”

5. Child rights are relevant to each individual child, groups of children, and those who care for them in a community of action.

The practitioner theme of “Nation Building: One Child at a Time” supported the understanding of importance of each child, just as the Convention on the Rights of the Child does in emphasising the right of the “child”, rather than “children” in its title. But as Kiaras Gharabaghi pointed out in his keynote presentation, we must think bigger because millions of children and youth are facing a difficult world. We need transfer the idea of connection across entire communities, allowing young people to solve their own problems. We should no longer focus on merely individual success in working with one young person as a goal and move towards collective power.

Children’s rights can help us. They are not only an obligation but also provide the direction of how to better support all children, not just an individual one.

Don Matera described the “furnaces of human indifference” and said during his keynote on July 2: “On your mark, get set, ready? Before you go, see who you can take with you.”

Community is built in numerous ways. For example, I appreciated the simple act of my neighbor grasping my hand to dance or to say hello during the practitioner plenaries, which also highlights the power of the moment that CYCs know well. Community is also advanced through the expansion of Isibindi programming outside of South Africa to Zambia and



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Namibia in refugee camps as we learned at the CYC conference. The facts that participation in the Youth Conference came from all over South Africa, with some international representation from Canada, Brazil and the United States, and adults from all over the world at the practitioner conference, highlighted the local and global sense of community.

In conclusion, these events highlighted for me the key points for us moving forward:

- the power of children's rights for young people
- the power of caring for children
- the power of finding and celebrating solidarity in doing so
- the power of music and singing to create and celebrate community
- the power of collaboration is both invaluable and necessary in order to move forward in support of children's rights

I am grateful to the NACCW and the Durban-based local organizing committee in organizing extraordinary events. Thank you to the Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University for a travel grant that supported my trip to South Africa; the Children's Institute, and UNICEF South Africa for supporting the travel of young people involved in the International and Canadian Child Rights Partnership from Brazil, Eastern Cape, and Canada to participate in the events.

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Breakfast is Served: How School-time Meal Programs Can Support Child Development

Theresa Fraser

What's for breakfast?

Canadian children registered in brick and mortar schools spend approximately 30 hours weekly in school. Their separation from primary caregivers can begin in preschool but will continue for 13 years. Teachers become primary role models and peers – a central part of their community. School becomes the place to learn everything from self-care, relationships and consent as well as academics (Bleazby, 2011). Preventative programming can be implemented and those who work with youth agree that it is important to look at the needs of children and youth within this aspect of their life space (Baskin, Wampold, Quintana & Enright, 2010).

The role of teachers

Though teachers are not solely responsible to reverse the attitudes and behaviours that students bring to school (Bleazby, 2011), teachers prepare and teach classes while also providing support, facilitating teams and special interest groups for students. They, with the support of other school



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personnel, work to meet the holistic needs of children while engaging them in their academic development.

The Circle of Courage

The Circle of Courage model (Brokenleg, Brendtro & van Bockern, 1990, 2002) explains the holistic growth needs of all children under four domains: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. This model asserts that children require opportunities to develop their potential. George Blue Bird, created artwork to represent the four domains of the circle of courage. He identified that the four colors (black, white, red, yellow) represented not only the four directions but also the races of people. The artist wanted his work to represent that all people should live in harmony together (Brokenleg et al, 1990).

The Spirit of Belonging

We all want and need to belong. Belonging occurs when trusting relationships are present that communicate the messages, I see you, I hear you, I love you. We need you! When you aren't here people miss you.

Activities that promote belonging include:

- Ensuring that all students are picked for teams by perhaps switching up the way youth are divided so there isn't a pattern of children being chosen last
- Learning the names of all students and building on previous conversations shared such as: "How did your soccer tournament go last weekend?" (Hewitt, 2007)
- Asking students to join a program or club because their input is needed
- Ensuring everyone has a seat at the table



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- A monthly birthday bulletin board of all children celebrating birthdays
- Structuring school entryways and hallways to resemble neighborhoods rather than institutions

The Spirit of Mastery

Parents, teachers and elders share wisdom with new or younger family members. In sharing knowledge, we support learning and the thirst for learning. We then support and live the belief that children learn and ultimately succeed.

Activities that support the spirit of mastery include:

- Not only congratulating students who do well but encouraging the effort (i.e., the journey as well as destination)
- Engaging community members and older students as mentors who support students who can benefit from others saying “I believe in you”.

The Spirit of Independence

When parents, teachers and elders support children to make decisions we are communicating to the child that we believe they can make their own decisions. This equips them to have the pride that they can risk and do.

Activities that support the spirit of independence include:

- Inviting students to engage in decision making such as engaging in ‘project-based learning’ and then sharing outcomes with larger groups of students



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- Inviting students to submit ideas and encouraging them to take ideas to the next step

The Spirit of Generosity

Character is supported when we care about what is going on for others. Caring creates meaning, which also creates purpose in our lives.

Activities that support the development of generosity include:

- Having older students support younger students in classrooms or learning centres
- Having students identify a community project and inviting them to pitch it to their principal or an external group that will support the initiative
- Encouraging students to complete acts of kindness for other students or friends and family
- Creating a “catch a kid doing good” program where kids tell on other kids who are doing something kind for another

Unity Through Relationship
2019

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In my experience with the Chignecto-Central Regional Center for Education in Nova Scotia, Canada, the spirit of belonging is reflected in many ways throughout the day with the greeting of students at the front door as well as the way staff engage with students during lunch and recess times. Flags or inspirational messages (all drawn by students) can be found on school walls. The most obvious school routine that communicates belonging, however, is evident in the daily sharing of meals as identified by the government of Nova Scotia:

Healthy, nourished students who feel safe are better able to learn, perform in class, and attend school more regularly. Those who achieve higher levels of education tend to experience better health as adults (Nova Scotia Government, n.d.).

Children in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have detailed requirements specifying which foods are, or are not, to be served for children in child care centres and schools (2011):

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and its many partners believe that healthy eating, active living, and other health-promoting behaviours, as part of Health Promoting Schools programs, are important investments in children and Youth. (Nova Scotia Education, 2007. p. 1)

Child and Youth Care practitioners know that mealtime includes more than just the food that is prepared, served and eaten. Mealtime includes the conversation that occurs when children, youth and caregivers join together to share stories and laughter (Maier, 2007).



Breakfast programs in Nova Scotia can be financially supported by specific businesses who provide supportive funding for all children in a school to share breakfast for an entire school year. This community support helps ensure that children do not go hungry at school. Food is available for a common breakfast time and also for lunchtime (if there is a need). There is a cafeteria that prepares hot lunches that can be purchased at a nominal fee. All food served is required to meet the guidelines set out by the province and this means foods are not fried or processed and are low on fat, sugar and caffeine because “health, nutrition and learning are linked” (Nova Scotia Government, n.d.). While there are still disparities in the support received by each school (sometimes driven by the socio-economic status of the surrounding neighbourhood), at least the province is making efforts toward this goal.

Most schools (elementary and high school) in Nova Scotia have cafeterias located on the school site. In other Canadian provinces, children can be required to eat at their desk or on the gymnasium floor. Cafeterias have shiny floors and positive message posters that all communicate to students that the space is specifically designed for your needs (Burns, 2006). There are often washers and dryers available to address the needs of children/youth who have had accidents throughout the day.



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In addition to ensuring children are not hungry, the breakfast program aims for all children to engage in one-on-one interaction with peers and adults before academics begin. This means that students are welcomed and experience someone checking in with them before their day begins. Adults in the school observe how specific children are doing, particularly if a child is beginning his day under stress. They then support the child in the moment or engage other team members in doing so. Other team members can include Guidance Counsellors, Schools' Plus staff (e.g., Facilitators, Outreach Workers), Teachers Assistants or Outreach Workers and Child and Youth Care Practitioners. In the best of these school environments, various staff support children individually or in groups to address their social, emotional, behavioural, and mental wellness needs while also supporting the domains of the Circle of Courage (i.e., belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity).

Many Canadian provinces provide support in various ways, however, some schools in Nova Scotia appear to understand how to ensure children feel like and are treated as part of the community. This sense of belonging can be a future and strong determinant of school success (Gillies, 2017). "When individuals belong...they believe a dyad, group, or community is not complete without them, and they are not complete without the dyad, group, or community" (Baskin, et al, 2010, p. 631).

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THERESA FRASER, CCW, CYC-P., CPT-S, RP, MA, RCT, is a certified Child and Youth Care Practitioner, Trauma, Loss and Attachment Clinical Specialist, and Clinician Professor. In 2017 she won national, provincial and community awards for her service with children, youth and families. In the spring of 2018, Theresa and her family moved from Ontario to Nova Scotia, which meant she couldn't teach at Sheridan or Wilfrid Laurier. However, she and her family are enjoying the beach that is five minutes from their home and a special 10 year old they adopted has made substantial gains from going to a school where he feels loved and cared for. Theresa is co-author with Dr. Mary Ventrella of the forthcoming text *A Tapestry of Relational Child and Youth Care Competencies* (which may be previewed at <https://www.canadianscholars.ca/subjects/child-and-youth-care/books/a-tapestry-of-relational-child-and-youth-care-competencies>). Theresa has also written chapters related to play therapy, attachment and development. Bruce Perry's *Neuro-sequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT)* has greatly impacted how Theresa lives and works.



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Relational
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Love and Child and Youth Care

Lauren Akbar

What are the first words that come to mind when you think of 'love'? For me it's family, friends, at times my Netflix, most definitely my peppermint tea, waking up without an alarm, lazy Sundays that turn into lazy Mondays. Most of all, I love the tones of sarcasm with just a sprinkle of truth.

After doing a quick online search, Google tells me that when other people think of 'love', they think of Valentine's Day, roses, chocolates, hugs, kisses, romance, Ryan Gosling in the movie 'The Notebook', and love songs like 'I Will Always Love You' by Whitney Houston, among other seemingly unrealistic things. Love is too often overly romanticized in a way which dilutes the meaning and too often scares us from actually expressing it. As a Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioner, why is it so hard for us to express love or admit to expressing love (without necessarily saying 'I love you') to the young people with whom we work? We expect young people to trust us, share their deepest, darkest stories with us, and bare their souls. And what do we give back? A thoughtless 'Thank you for sharing' or 'I appreciate you trusting me with your story'. Surely they deserve much more.



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Love in My CYC Practice

Seven years ago, fresh out of my undergraduate degree program, I worked in Indigenous communities in North-Western Ontario, Canada. I was the perfect example of what some call 'bright-eyed and bushy-tailed'. My eagerness to succeed in the field seeped out of my veins, came with a smile and a whole lot of 'yes, of course' and 'I will get right to it'. The concept of 'no' seemed foreign to me. I gave my heart and in turn, lost it. These years were some of the most transformational that I have ever had. But, also, some of the most challenging I have ever faced.

One community I worked with in particular had declared a *State of Emergency* for the tragically high number of suicides that took place within a very short period of time. I worked with one young woman—to protect her confidentiality, I will call her Bee—for two years. She was 14 at the time and a brilliant photographer. We did not bond instantly at all. It took quite a long time to build a relationship, but once we did, we became quite close. She had begun calling me 'Big Kid' as she felt I was a kid at heart, which was and probably still is true. To poke fun back at her, I called her 'Little Kid'. She hated it. I loved it. Bee and I worked to spread awareness of the high suicide rates in her community and many others similar to hers. We traveled to workshops, hosted art exhibits and youth conferences to share her voice and the voices of other young people in her community. Over the two years working together, we had spent quite some time together, laughing, getting to know one another, sharing stories, learning new things, and hopefully empowering other young people to share their voices through art. Bee was not only a talented photographer – she could also bead, draw, and write poetry, among other things. On one of her trips to Toronto with several other youth from her community, we did all things art. We visited the Art Gallery of Ontario, went to every art store, wandered the streets admiring various street artists, and



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of course, visited the Ontario College of Arts and Design. She had been dreaming of going to this college, so the visit was extra special for her.

Bee had been surrounded by suicide since she was born. She had witnessed more suicides than births or weddings. She had thoughts of suicide for many years, had seen several therapists, and attempted on more than one occasion. This was a reality that was new for me and that, admittedly, I did not understand at that time. But growing as close as we had, I did what I could to learn and did my best to support her, and guide her, as appropriate, in seeking further support.

Since Bee lived in a remote community in Northern Ontario, when I was back home, in Toronto, we would communicate mostly via Facebook. One night she had messaged me, telling me about a new animal she had invented called a 'Caticorn' which obviously is a cat and a unicorn mixed together - pretty much the coolest animal that could possibly exist. Little did I know, this was her way of saying 'Goodbye' to me. I got a call several hours after chatting with her. The call was from her mother's best friend, telling me that Bee had completed suicide.

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Even as I am writing this, I am taken back to that moment. I remember it clearly. I was frozen. I was shocked and deeply hurt. I had no idea what to say or do. I had just been talking to her, we were laughing and chatting. It was a typical conversation for us. In my view at that time, there were no signs pointing to this. We had discussed safety plans, shared relevant resources. In fact, we had just submitted an application to a mental health treatment centre. And then this. In my eyes, I had failed as a practitioner but mostly, I had failed my 'Little Kid'.

After receiving this news, I felt as if I was moving through the world in a different way, I did not know how to go forward working with young people. I felt extremely lost and then this realization came over me—all of these feelings I was having were because I loved her. And not in the romantic sense, but I cared deeply for her and I still do.

After her funeral, everything seemed quite blurry. I left my job, moved back home with my parents for a short while and I definitely was not as eager to build relationships with any young people, any time soon. I became quite distant in my practice. In fact, I became quite cynical, which at the time felt right. I mean, why would I ever bring love into my practice again?

It has been over four years since Bee's suicide and although it is something that has taken time to work through, I realize now that her suicide had become about me and not about honouring her. I deeply regret this, although I could not help my genuine anger and hurt from this loss. What I knew then and can put into words now, is that suicide is the leading cause of death for Indigenous youth and that young people, like Bee, are facing the intergenerational effects of historic trauma, colonization and forced relocation (Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2018). Although I knew this then, I had convinced myself that this could not and would not happen to Bee. What I have learned is that suicide is not a choice. In fact, I



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have been told by many young people that it often feels like their only option. Sadly, for Bee this was also true.

Instead of continuing the work Bee and I had started, I became consumed with grief and guilt, which made me lose sight of the bigger picture – which really was and is love.

Child and Youth Care as a profession has 'care' right in the title, thus, we should be naturally inclined to care about the young people with whom we work. And not in a superficial sense, but in a real and deep sense that moves us and changes how we walk through this world—this is love.

After some time to myself, I decided to go back to work. I found a new job and continued to work with Indigenous communities. This new job also moved me to Thunder Bay in the province of Ontario, Canada. One part of the story I did not share was that Bee left her community to go to high school in Thunder Bay and we had worked together there for some time. Upon arrival in Thunder Bay, for my new job, with way too many suitcases and again, that same eagerness (well maybe not entirely the same), I was rushed with memories of Bee and her family. However, this time it did not completely leave me frozen in my footsteps. It began to guide me. I started to believe that I was brought to Thunder Bay for a reason and that I needed to follow where this was leading me.

Over the next couple of years, I moved back home, traveled, became much more confident and grounded in my practice, I grew and healed (for the most part), but most significantly, I took back love into my practice and was no longer afraid of it. Being back in Thunder Bay reminded me of the power that love and care can have in practice. That I was not being true to myself by leaving it out of my work, nor was I building genuine, trusting or meaningful relationships without love or care. Bee helped me to remember this.



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Although suicide will always be a heavy topic, it is incredibly important to talk about these heavier topics with love. Especially in the field of Child and Youth Care, we need to embrace hard conversations with warmth and care, but also with the ability to advocate, educate, and acknowledge how challenging some of these things really are—things that our youth face every single day.

All in all, this experience taught me how love is naturally within me to give to others. This may not be the case for everyone, but it is for me. I am not a cynic, but can be cynical at times. What comes much more naturally to me as a person and a Child and Youth Care practitioner, is to show young people love, kindness and care.

We all really could use a little more love in our lives.

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Facing Assault

Barrie Lodge

Social media in South Africa has recently featured a video of schoolboys assaulting a teacher. Apparently, they barricaded the classroom door to prevent his escape.

The video, as expected, raised comment. One was, "public servants experience abuse whilst they work to provide service – DO SOMETHING Angy (Minister of Education), Cyril (State President)!"

At the Department of Social Development Child and Youth Care Conference 2018 this week, that very cry was frequently heard as a thread from speakers and child and youth care workers.

The Chairperson of the Gauteng Province Child and Youth Care Worker's Forum in government facilities raised several challenges. On the list was " Child and youth care workers assaulting young people and young persons assaulting child and youth care workers."

Staff assaulting children and young persons is an obvious violation of our professional code of ethics, a criminal act and workplace misconduct. If proven, it provides grounds for sanctions imposed on the worker by the South Africa Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). Nothing more need be said.

Assault of child and youth care workers was raised again by the representative of the Trade Union. In his presentation on aspects of "Labour", he quoted the South African Constitution saying that one has a right to lay charges (against the young person).



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The issue came up again in the time for questions and answers ... long comments on the assaultive behaviours of young persons in trouble with the law either awaiting trial or sentenced in Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCC) or in Places of Safety. Most of these I couldn't follow because of the language used. It was clear, when the heart runs over, the mouth is filled with mother tongue. Some comments I did follow.

"If we lay charges", it was said, the court sentences the young person and then sends them right back to us – we face the same young person again. The same applies to youth on youth assault, they are back in residence with the same child they assaulted." ... Applause!

"Can we use self defence?" ... Applause!

Some history

In 1995, President Nelson Mandela instituted a national enquiry into the care conditions for children and young persons at South African the then called Places of Safety and Places of Detention. It was known as the Cabinet Enquiry headed by the then Minister of Welfare", Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. We dubbed her the "Minister of Children". The conditions and the nature of care was appalling. So much so, when we were giving feedback, Minister Geraldine was prepared to give us trauma counselling.



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In facilities I visited, young persons reported that workers assaulted them, telling of broken jaws and ribs then refusing medical attention. In one Gauteng facility, security guards were positioned in towers. In some firearms were carried by security guards There were some facilities with double fencing and patrol dogs. Yet in one of these, a child and youth care worker was lured into a "cell" by a fake disruption. His skull was fractured and indented in the assault against him. The other child and youth care workers then refused to interact with the young persons in the facility. They sat in groups in the courtyard, demanded training in the use of "donkey tail" riot batons and the payment of danger money.

When the children and the young persons held in South African adult prisons were released by law, thousands were redirected into Places of Safety and Detention. There was a trickle-down effect with children and young persons with more troubled behaviours and with greater troubles placed into the system including Children's Homes. Staff at all the levels of residential service were simply unqualified and unprepared to provide appropriate responses in practice. In one Place of Safety for example, a group of young persons were stamping down the stairs in unison. The well-intentioned care worker said (translated from the Afrikaans) "Be good children and I'll make you a cake!" She was assaulted by the group.

It was a crisis

Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi initiated "Operation Upgrade", an accelerated training programme for child and youth care workers to better prepare for working with more difficult behaviours. It was at this time that Masud Hoghughi came to South Africa from UK and introduced Physical Restraint training. He made it very clear that, what he called "laying hands" on a young person was a very last resort and the very severest of behaviour management practices. Then came Prof Nicolas (Nick) Smiar from Canada



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and trained child and youth care workers in the Professional Assault response method (PART), Different from restraint PART sets out to be a non-injurious response to assault, with a focus on prevention and awareness to escalating behaviour. It focuses on the limitation of physical movement to reduce harm to child and the child care worker. Many were trained to become PART trainers and many child and youth care workers were trained in this practice.

More recently the Response Ability Pathways (RAP) programme was introduced into South Africa by Larry Brendtro and Lesley du Toit. as well as various professional behaviour management practices and models that are now very much a part of child and youth care training at the pre-degree level. These include early preventative and interventive responses to de-escalate individual and group assaultive indications and behaviours.

What am I trying to say here? Professional responses and techniques distinguish child and youth care practice from self defence and direct, possible injurious reactions to assaultive behaviour when working with young persons. After all, we know that we work with young people who have the potential to act out assaultive behaviours. So we know that we must be appropriately prepared. You WILL experience the threat if not an attempt at physical hurt at some time. I did. Professional training and education is very obviously a first and essential requirement so that we don't have to rely on security guards.

Way back in 1935, Alan Paton was made the principal of a Reformatory in Diepkloof, Soweto, Johannesburg. Over time he was able to remove all the barbed wire fencing. He had no security guards. His approach – relationship, trust and the programme hold young people, not the fences.

But we are still faced with the dilemma. If you do get assaulted, as a professional child and youth care worker do you, or do you not lay charges? In a therapeutic relationship with a focus on helping young people to



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better cope with life situation, and to model a more caring response than the children experience often in our society (the repetitive criminal label) do we lay charges?

We do have an alternative that can be handled in-house or through the justice procedures if we negotiate for it, and that is the now well-developed procedure of Restorative Justice. But change in behaviour, we all know is difficult, painful and often not accomplished in a short period of time. It's hard and difficult work for us as child and youth care workers and for the young people in our professional care.

We have come a long way with staff wellness programmes now including de-briefing, referral for professional help if needed, education and training and danger money. We have come a long way.

BARRIE LODGE is a Child and Youth Care worker near Johannesburg in South Africa. He has served as a teacher, clinical manager, and director of two children's homes. This column was originally published 10 June 2019 on Barrie's blog at <http://childandouthcaretalk.blogspot.com/2018/06/facing-assaultchild-and-youth-care-in.html>

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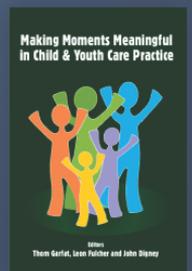
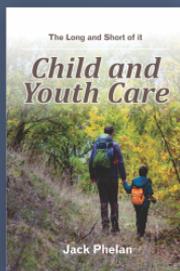
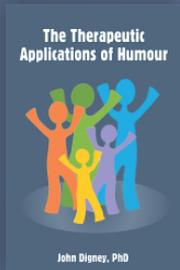
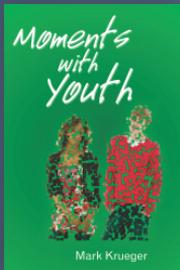
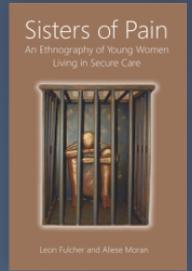
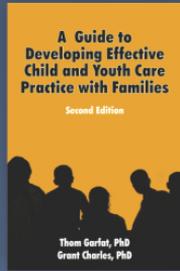
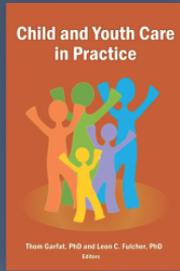
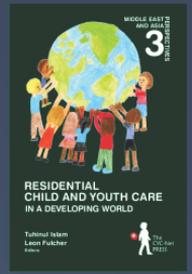
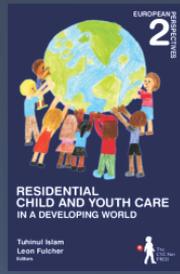
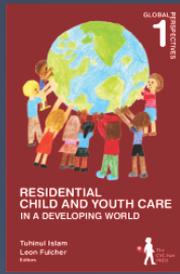
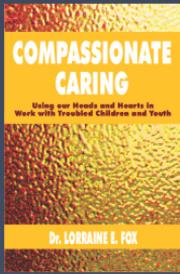
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Postcard from Leon Fulcher

Port Douglas, North Queensland – Australia

Kia Ora Koutou,
MaComrades!
I wanted to

share some observations about our visit to North Queensland for a family reunion after the Durban, South Africa Conference. From Durban I flew back to Dubai and then to Sydney and another flight to Cairns before an hour's drive along the coast to Port Douglas. What a beautiful place!

As a family, we rented a big house for a week that housed everyone in family groups. A day trip out to the Great Barrier reef was followed by a quieter day



North Queensland's Daintree Forest is a modest drive north of Port Douglas!



Port Douglas, Queensland is a stopping off point for the Great Barrier Reef



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near to the house swimming pool. An activity day followed by a slower day seemed to work well for everyone.

With grandchildren ranging in age from 10 down to 2, the beginners trip out to the Great Barrier Reef was more than sufficient as a starter. Spotting fish and turtles while snorkelling and while watching through the glass bottom boat offered more than enough to keep everyone occupied.

Some were ready to get off the boat and entered the Port Douglas Butterfly House with enthusiasm. This research centre offered a range of learning

opportunities, including the life cycles of 6-8 butterflies. From caterpillar to chrysalis to butterflies in a protected habitat – it was very special.

Cable surfing in the Daintree Forest was a family activity for the older children, and grandparents of course. Health and safety awareness were ever present, from selecting a hard hat with its own special name through to the harness procedure and the use of both safety clips.



Family snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef was fun for some



The delicate and colourful butterflies and moths in the Butterfly House were a treat



Cable surfing in the Daintree Forest as a family was a challenging activity for all



Health and Safety featured at every move but was managed unobtrusively by staff

Most of the moves were carried out in pairs, with staff collecting ‘surfers’ at each transfer.

With experience and confidence, the forest surfing actually gave individual opportunities before ending with a race that ended abruptly. Some were surprised that grandparents participated!

Batman even had a go upside down with no hands! As if there was much to hold onto anyway!



Look, Batman with no hands!



Wildlife Habitat offered a treat for the children to get close to Australian animals

The Wildlife Habitat Centre in Port Douglas was a real hit with our family. We went for the brunch option and then bought food for the animals before wandering around the complex meeting Australian animals and birds. A pictorial guide is provided to help spot animals and birds. They also offered educational opportunities at different times around the complex.

The encounter with a big blue-headed Southern Cassowary bird was a real special surprise. I can imagine the fright one might experience if encountering one of these in the wild! Getting up close and touching a snake was a new experience for most. The American grandchildren were thrilled to hold a real live Koala Bear that was hugging them as well (or holding on in fear)!



We never knew there were a dozen types of kangaroo, including tree kangaroos!



Our guide on the river cruise said that Australian Crocodiles love Stupid!

The children were able to feed kangaroos with animal pellets sold in the shop. We had not realized that there are more than a dozen varieties of kangaroo in Australia – large, medium size and small. Nor did we know about the Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo. These solitary figures with long tails live in the trees of North Queensland and apparently only find a mate during the breeding season. The rest of the time they are apparently isolates by choice.

All in all, we had a very pleasant and enjoyable family time in North Queensland, and will go there again, for sure. Port Douglas and North Queensland is not recommended during the hot season when humidity is said to be intolerable. But as an Australian Winter Break? Definitely.

Queensland is about Sugar Cane, Tourism and Coal – A Challenge for Australia's Pacific Neighbours



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Information

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- We are willing to work with first-time authors to help them get published
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