

# Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

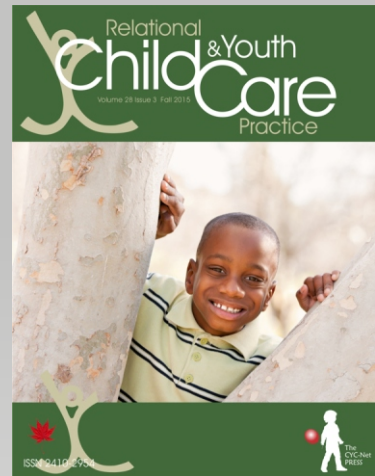
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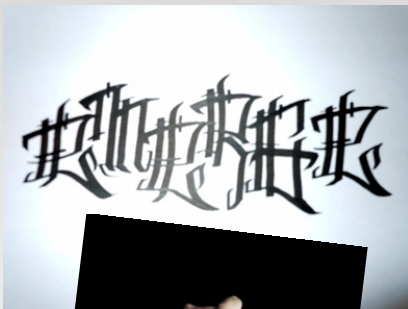


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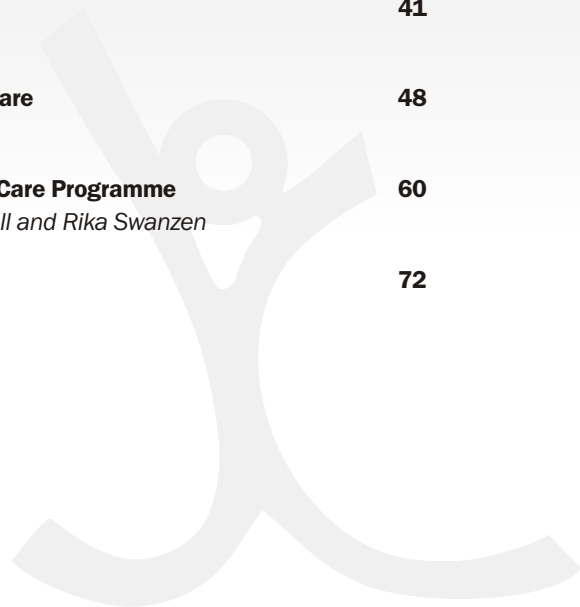
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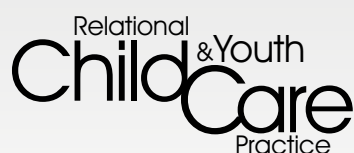


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**“The children almost broken by the  
world become the adults most likely to  
change it.”**

**— Frank Warren**



(formerly *The Journal of Child & Youth Care*, established 1982) is committed to promoting and supporting the profession of Child and Youth Care through disseminating the knowledge and experience of individuals involved in the day-to-day lives of young people.

This commitment is founded upon the belief that all human issues, including personal growth and development, are essentially “relational”.

# Watch Yourself!

**Heather Snell**

CYC practice literature is steeped in discussions describing reflective practice. Michael Burns, Gerry Fewster, Thom Garfat, Kiaras Gharabaghi, Mark Krueger, and Carol Stuart who are some of the most prolific writers in our profession have written eloquently about the reflexive nature of our work. Many of these CYC innovators have applied thinking about experiential learning, building on the work of David Schön to describe the reflective practitioner as one who consciously thinks about what they are doing in the moment while continuing to think about their actions long after the action has been completed; reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action. Indeed it seems we have been reflecting about reflection for a very long time! This issue of RCYCP does not break with that tradition. Authors in this issue share a range of empirical evidence, practice and personal experi-

ence while demonstrating the central importance of reflection as a way to make meaning of it all.

In *Engaging Youths through Hip-Hop: Towards a Responsive, Relational, Political Youth Care Practice*, Paul Paget writes powerfully about building relationships with youth through rap culture. This article is far more than an exposé describing rap inspired youth programs. Paget identifies his *feelings*, his relationship with youth culture, his identity as an artist and as a CYC practitioner before finally reflecting and connecting his experience with the Hip Hop Industrial Complex as a metaphor for the political momentum of CYC professionalism. Paget's prose is another wonderful example of the reflective voice so characteristic of CYC writing. He writes authentically, demonstrating both the 'in' action and then the 'on' action application of reflection.

Joselin Zak also writes reflectively in her contribution *Mindfulness in CYC practice: A look within to prevent professional burnout*.

Connecting her eagerness to 'give back' and her need to 'make a difference' with her temptation to 'fan the flames' of social change in her CYC classroom, Zak shares with us her own reflective process. She finds a pathway linking her own professional practice actions, her physical and emotional 'self' and her teaching practices. The outcome of this reflection is Zak's decision to engage students in reflective processes rather than escalating their outrage about social injustice. By choosing to support students to become more mindful Zak considers her practice knowledge through reflection and reaches a decision that impacts her future course of action. She also shares her experiential learning with students encouraging them to integrate emotional 'self' with important physical and sensory experience. Zak challenges not only students, but also readers, to not forget about the physical 'self'; to care about our eating, breathing and sitting.

We are reminded that the concept of 'self' is multi-faceted containing, or sometimes not containing,



emotional, spiritual, cognitive and physical attributes. As we know from direct practice the living space of the emotional 'self' is often our physical domain. Erika van der Grinten concentrates on the multi-faceted and integrated nature of 'self' in her exploration of the *Impact of Physical Restraints in Care*. Sensing disconnections between aspects of 'self', van der Grinten calls for much needed professional and personal reflection about the use of physical restraints in care. In true reflective form, she urges us to consider how participating in a restraint actually *feels* during *and* after the action. In many ways van der Grinten is calling for research to don the reflective lens of practice in order to investigate not just the action of restraints but also the absorbed impact of this action long after it is over.

While this issue of RCYCP continues the well-established tradition of Child and Youth Care as a reflexive practice – I am troubled. Not by the fine examples of reflective writing evident in every issue of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice. No. It is not the process of reflection that concerns me ... it is the language used and the intention of reflection that gives me pause. More and more when reading about reflective

practice these days I find I am reading about the importance of something called *The Self*. It is as if *The Self* is emerging in our literature as a detached entity. The rationale for attaining this detached state seems to be an enhanced ability to view *The Self* impartially. This detached point of view is lauded as a gateway to objectivity; the theory being reflection about *The Self* can somehow enable clarity outside of the moment, somehow enable a stepping outside of *The Self*. This suggests we are able to 'watch' *The Self* sans attachments, motivations, or without the inter-subjectivity of relationship. The drivers for this type of reflective gazing seem to be a growing professionalized demand for neutrality, and/or an academic desire to demonstrate objectivity.

As I engage in my own reflection I realize the expressions '*The Self*', and its cousin '*Use of Self*' trouble me when they are used to describe processes that disembody rather than embody our understanding. I believe our need as practitioners to reflect, both in action and on action, should relate to a desire to authentically enhance our awareness and then to integrate this enhanced awareness into our dynamic relationships with

others. Neutrality and objectivity are the antithesis of this action. As practitioners we are neither neutral nor passive. We have positions, emotional responses, beliefs and motivations. Do we need to understand our own positions? Certainly – by all means we need to reflect on the ways in which we have influence, and be aware of who has influence over us. We often need to consider our own drivers toward control, and power and on occasion be willing to unpack practices that are dissonant or contrary. But these reflections should transform and integrate who and how we 'are' rather than seeking an artificial third person point of view. Phrases such as '*The Self*' and '*Use of Self*' are a form of illeism more aptly associated with feelings of being outside of one's body and watching things happen – a sort of disconnect implying that we can, and should 'watch' *The Self* in action. Watching *The Self* in this way for later objective replay casts us into the role of dispassionate video critic – watching *The Self* through disembodied eyes. In relational work this can never be; relationships are deeply embodied. Each relational experience informs the next; each is integral to who and how we are. Integral – this word implies

integration, undivided and fundamental – certainly not neutral or objective.

While continuing to ponder my discomfort with the use of the third person implied by the expression “*The Self*” and with an image of the reflective process as a video critique I was struck by Robin Jackson’s article *Jeremy Bentham, thou should’st be living now – or the Panopticon revisited!* Jackson’s expose on the commodification of social care and the increase in electronic monitoring systems in the UK begins with a reference to the Panopticon. Originally proposed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by theorist Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon was a type of institutional building designed in such a way that one observer could watch multiple prisoners at the same time. It was described in its time as the ultimate means of gaining power of mind over mind. Jackson compares the arrays of sensors in modern care facilities as the 21<sup>st</sup> century Panopticon. A few watchers can now observe people living in care without the need for rhythmic relational human contact. Advocates for such monitoring systems argue they are cost effective and provide safety for both residents and care providers. The objective camera lens is thought to pro-

tect care workers and residents while its ability to record interactions provides the data needed to make difficult managerial decisions. Does any of this sound familiar? When watched with those disembodied eyes evidence based decision making is thought to be superior as it is considered free of the subjective bias that taints relational experience. Neutral. Objective. Jackson is writing directly to relational practitioners when he describes monitoring devices installed in lieu of caring relationships, risk aversion management that trumps ethical practice, and the growing marginalization of engaged and caring practitioners. But there is another chill to Jackson’s voice – a chill that connects to the concept of the disembodied *Use of Self*. The unnerving cameras described by Jackson seem an apt metaphor for the trend to objectify reflection in an effort to find the neutral *Self* in CYC practice.

When we strive to view *The Self* objectively we forget who we are and we marginalize those who we are with. When we are watching *The Self* do we need to ask who is actually doing the watching? No. Reflection is not the path to objectified awareness. It is not a camera lens. It is not an intellectual-

ized tool of professionalized practice. Reflection is one of many ways in which we find and make meaning. It is an experience in and of itself which comes when we pause long enough to integrate personal experience with shared relational knowledge. Meaning making does require reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action but as a continuous process – not as a two-step instant replay used in the hope of informed objectivity. Reflection is as much a sensory, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and relational experience as the action it contemplates. And ‘*The Self*’ and the expression ‘Use of Self’? ... Well, maybe it is time for a little more reflection ... lights ... camera ...action?



### **Heather Snell**

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# Keep the Memories: Missed Moments of Connectedness

**Thom Garfat**

**S**ome memories are worth keeping and going back to as we move along in our careers as professional Child and Youth Care Workers. As I sit in the twilight, I remember some scenes from the early sunrise days of my experience.

\* \* \*

I remember the first time I 'met' a family in child and youth care work. Man, they were so messed up, and I was so knowledgeable – you know where this is going, right? The undeserved arrogance of the new worker, uneducated in anything about family and, even, what

a family is, let alone how to actually 'work' with them. I guess it would be fair to say that I grew up in one and met some of the families of my friends, so I wasn't totally inexperienced.

So, to that first family meeting with Jed and Emilie Sombers. We held it in the afternoon, in the group home. They had said it was an inconvenient time and place but, as my supervisor pointed out, "if we make everything too easy, they won't think it is important. And if he has to tell his boss why he needs time off, well, that could be a good thing. Increase his commitment."

Okay, okay! In retrospect it sounds like my supervisor was as ignorant as I was about family work. There were other young people in the family, but Natalie was placed with us and that is all we cared about at the time. And we knew, because we had been to a workshop, that the parents were the problem.

They show up at the appointed time. I take them to the office and, pointing to two chairs sitting in front of the desk reserved for such meetings, I said, "Jed. Emilie. Have a seat. We need to talk about how you are with Natalie."

Well, you can likely imagine how it went from there.

Cue thunder and lightning, bring on the storms and move on to the next scenario.

\* \* \*

Jake was 18 and a half and was still in care because the state had decided to extend his stay. Everyone believed he needed more work (support) before he moved on to live on his own. It was a 'privilege' granted to only a few and in order to take advantage of this privilege he had to 'abide by the program'. I was working the night shift when he came in a half hour late, smelling of beer after having been out with some friends.

When he comes in, I call him into the office where I was sitting at the desk filling out the evening's paperwork.

"You're late," I said barely looking up from the paperwork.

"I know," he said. I was with my friends and I forgot the time. Sorry."

"And you smell like you have been drinking."

"Ya. Well. ... I did have a couple of beers with my friends but only a couple."

"So where did you get the beer?"

"My friends bought it. They are old enough."

"Well, you're not old enough to be drinking. You go out. Hang around with older guys. Drink. Come home late. Is this your idea of respecting the program?"

"I know," he says. "But this is the first time in 6 months. It's my first mistake."

"And it may be your last," I say. "Who knows what's going to happen when your Social Worker reads this report about tonight. Maybe you need to think about where you are going to live if you can't stay here anymore."

"Can't stay here? Can't stay here? I make one mistake and you ... "

Cue thunder, lightning and storms again. Oh, and call for back-up!

\* \* \*

It had been a rough shift. All night long the kids had been on the verge of being 'out of control' – all 6 of them. Not just one or two, but the whole group. It was, to say the least, difficult. And no matter what we did, we could not bring them under control.

Finally, we decided to get them together to have a group meeting. I had read somewhere that this was a good strategy to 'help the group help itself'. Maybe I should have read the other book on how to facilitate a group meeting.

Finally, after a lot of threats and promises, we managed to herd them all into the living room. I took charge because I was the one who decided to call the meeting.

They were, of course, not interested in talking so I talked to (lectured?) them for a while about what they had been doing, the privileges they were losing and what would happen if they 'kept it up'. I made sure they all knew they were risking being grounded, moved down a phase, etc., etc. thinking that if they only understood what they were risking, they would see the light.

"Fuck you!" Marty screamed. You keep us locked up all day, sit in the office doing nothing and then whip out your *con-seeee-quences* when we don't do

what you want. Well, fuck you!"

"That's it Marty. Go to your room!" I yelled. "And I will come and tell you when it is time to come out – but trust me, it won't be before breakfast."

The rest of the kids started to protest but, ignoring the panicked look on my partner's face, I cut them off with "Unless you all want the same consequence as Marty, you'd better settle down."

Cue thunder, lightning and storms. And, oh yes, call back-up, maybe the riot squad this time. And could someone please call the building repair and maintenance people as well.

\* \* \*

I could tell a lot of other stories as well. I carry these memories with me and revisit them occasionally so that I won't forget them. I could also tell you a lot of other, more positive stories about times when things went well.

But in the stories of times when, in our naivety or early ignorance, things did not go well we find important lessons. And these lessons are just (maybe even more) as important as the lessons learned from times when things went well. At the risk of stating the obvious, here are



a few things of which these memories remind me:

- Intervention without connection is seldom effective
- The exercise of authority without respect and permission is seldom a good choice
- If you do not take time to notice what is going on, you are acting in ignorance

I am glad I had those experiences. They remind me not only of what I did not know, but what I have subsequently learned. I am grateful for them.

So, appreciate your errors and search for the learning. Above all else, save and revisit the scenarios of ignorance.



**Thom Garfat, PhD**

is the co-owner of *Transformation International* and the co-founder of *CYC-Net*. Information about Thom can be found [here](#).

Youth smiles without  
any reason.  
It is one of its  
chiefest charms.

Thomas Gray



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information

# Relational & Youth Child & Care Practice

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