



# Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

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Guest Editors  
James Freeman  
Thom Garfat

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TRAINING



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(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".

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# Moments of Learning

Guest Editors

*James Freeman and Thom Garfat*

**W**e've all been there: stuck in a training session counting the minutes until it's over. You've also likely experienced a training event where time flies by and you leave with new perspectives, enhanced skills, and renewed hope for the work you do on a daily basis. There are many factors that make the difference between good and poor training (e.g. content design, meeting environment, preparation of participants, support from supervisor or organization), yet the skill of the trainer is a primary factor. The best trainers have the ability to be present with participants, engage their imagination, and make learning easy.

## **Being Present**

Relational child and youth care (CYC) uses moments in everyday life to open up opportunities for change. Good training does the same thing. A quality trainer is constantly on the lookout for moments of opportunity for learning which open up for participants.

Being present with participants is important because training participants, just like the children and families we serve, bring their struggles, fears, questions, and dreams to each training event. Unless we focus on connecting with them we miss opportunities to make the training meaningful to them. It's in moments of being present that trainers can model creating the experience of safety and connectedness.

## Engaging the Imagination

Quality training also engages the imagination. It's more than 'delivering' information, completing an outline or getting through a slide presentation. Effective practitioners model creativity and openness to new learning. Our training efforts must engage both logic and affect because:

*[Y]outh work runs principally on the quality of its imagination. Professional development needs to pay attention also to developing the imagination and creativity of workers, honing their intelligence, learning new theory or new frameworks for understanding old problems."*  
(Sercombe, 2010, p. 160)

Our training efforts can lead to new ways of being, interpreting, and doing in our world. This process requires not only first-order change (which is the incremental addition of knowledge and skills) but also second-order change which Henry Maier describes as transformative:

*Second-order learning occurs through shifts in thinking to a new level. In fact, learning becomes ecological; as new learning takes hold, previous conceptions, skills, and values become reorganized and a transformation occurs.* (Maier, 1986, p. 41)

Training that engages the imagination and focuses on the transformation of the learner does not simply encourage practitioners to do more of what they already know how to do. It equips practitioners to be and act in creative ways based on the needs of individual children and family members.

## Making Learning Easy

Effective trainers also make learning easy for participants. They create environments of safety and remove barriers to learning. They become good at scaffolding learning in ways that promote the process and transfer of learning. In this special issue for trainers you will find sixteen articles from around the globe that will help you think about these things.

Among the contributors to this issue seven countries are represented: Austria, Canada, Kenya, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, and the United States. You'll notice three themes or groupings. The first grouping of articles guides us in thinking about a theory or framework for CYC training. Second, there are a number of articles full of practical tips from trainers with a variety of experiences. The strategies readers will glean from these experienced trainers will help in exploring their own development and provide new ideas to integrate into their own facilitation style. The final grouping of contributors provides us with examples of research and application of CYC training into the academic setting.

In the final days of editing this issue, we learned of the sudden passing of Rose Macharia after a brief illness. Rose was a Training Coordinator for the SOS Children's Villages near Nairobi, Kenya. She is described by those close to her as a "much loved friend and colleague", "inspiring", and one "who worked for the best of society and the community". Three attributes to which any CYC trainer might aspire. Her article in this issue is one of her final contributions to the CYC field.

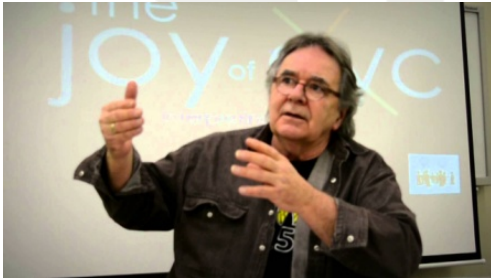
As you read through the contributors in this issue, we hope you see that, just as CYC practice addresses the whole child, good training addresses the whole participant:

*Learning is change. Essentially, learning means a change in your thinking, a change in your feeling, a change in your behavior. Learning means that a change takes place in the mind, in the emotions, and in the will. When someone has learned, that person will have changed.*  
(Hendricks, p. 83-84)

In our wonderful field of CYC more and more practitioners are engaged in, or would like to be engaged in, delivering training to those who work with children and families in need. Program and legislative expectations related to quality training are increasing and financial resources demand responsible use of training efforts. Yet, there is little education or training in 'how to be a trainer' and, equally, there are few publications which address the same. Thus, our offering of this special issue of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice is partially to address this gap and, more importantly, support the efforts of CYC trainers around the world in making a difference in the lives of young people.

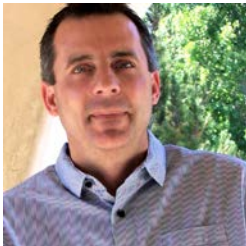
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# Developmental Considerations in Training for Child and Youth Care Workers in Residential Care

*Heather Modlin*

## *Abstract*

This article introduces Robert Kegan's constructive-developmental theory as a lens through which to view the training needs of child and youth care practitioners. The creation of a holding environment as a way to enhance the training experience is discussed.

## *Keywords*

constructive-developmental theory, meaning-making, training needs,  
transfer of learning, practitioners

## **Introduction**

Training alone will not lead to improved practice or better outcomes for children (Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998); staff must also be able to transfer training into practice (Clough, Bullock & Ward, 2005). The most important factor in transfer of learning appears to be the readiness and openness of the practitioner to engage in specific training. For training to be useful, it must focus on what the practitioner needs to learn and is able to understand, rather than what the trainer or curricula would like to deliver.

Some authors have identified that personal characteristics of the staff are more important than education or experience (Barford & Whelton, 2010; Hicks, Gibbs, Weatherly & Byford, 2009; Krueger, 1986; Stuart & Carty, 2006; Whitaker, Archer &



Hicks, 1998). According to Garfat (1998), professional child and youth care practice requires that practitioners have a high level of self-confidence and responsibility, a general and immediate sense of self, and an awareness of contextual factors. Whitaker *et al* (1998) identified that staff who can best cope with the job are self-confident, sensitive to the moods and needs of others, in touch with their own feelings, able to courageously handle difficult situations, and able to engage in reflective practice. In their study on burnout, Barford and Whelton (2010) found that “child and youth care workers who were emotionally stable and selfless experienced significantly less cynicism towards the children and youth residing in their facility” (p. 283). Other studies have found that individuals with an internal locus of control experienced greater job satisfaction and less burnout (Seti, 2007).

In child and youth care the personal and professional are intertwined. Residential care is unique in that the personal qualities of practitioners are placed in the forefront (Smith, 2009). Ward (1998) discussed the importance of developing *psychological presence*, which includes the capacity for authenticity and connectedness, and stated that this is integral to the norms of effective child and youth care practice. According to Ward, the personal factors that contribute to an individual’s ability to be psychologically present include stages of adult development. Similarly, Kahn (1992) identified adult development as a factor that impacts an individual’s ability to engage.

### **Kegan’s Constructive-Developmental Theory**

One way to examine the personal and professional development of child and youth care workers is through Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory of adult development. Constructive-developmental theory is a complex model of human development that addresses the way individuals construct or organize experiences related to themselves and others, and the way in which an individual’s sense of self, in relation to other, evolves over the life span.

Kegan (1982) conceptualizes being human as an activity of meaning-making. We are constantly engaged in a process of organizing our experiences and making sense of them. The theory is constructive-developmental in that it considers the way in which an individual’s beliefs construct the reality in which they live and the way these beliefs can develop and change over time (Kegan *et al*, 2001).

In Kegan's theory, the individual is considered to be an active participant in his own growth (Popp & Portnow, 2001) through the processes of assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium. Faced with new experiences, individuals first attempt to interpret the situation through their existing way of knowing. This process of assimilation is an attempt by the individual to make familiar that which is unfamiliar. New information can be assimilated into an individual's existing way of knowing as long as it approximates their current interpretive framework. When information is not readily incorporated into one's existing meaning-making structure, the structure itself must change or be substantially modified in order to accommodate the new information. Developmental growth and change occurs when there is a 'moderate challenge' to the individual's current way of knowing that requires the creation of a wholly new interpretive logic" (Popp & Portnow, 2001, p. 53). It is important to note that "it is out of necessity that individuals' interpretive lenses radically and qualitatively change, or are accommodated. "In other words, we assimilate if we can and accommodate if we must" (Popp & Portnow, 2001, p. 53).

How these processes of assimilation or accommodation are played out is largely dependent on the nature of precipitating events and the psychosocial environment. To facilitate developmental growth, in addition to creating disequilibrium, the growth mechanism must be interpersonal in nature, emotionally engaging, and personally relevant (Valcea, Hamdani, Buckley & Novicevic, 2011). Even in an environment that promotes developmental growth, transformative change can be a slow process; the evolution from one way of knowing to another can take years (Kegan et al, 2001).

## **Meaning-Making Systems**

Kegan (1982) asserts that our meaning-making evolves progressively over the course of the life span through six qualitatively different developmental stages, or "systems." The most common meaning systems found in adulthood are Instrumental, Socialized, and Self-authoring.

### ***Instrumental Meaning-Making System***

At the *Instrumental* stage the individual has gained control of his/her perceptions and impulses and is embedded in, or subject to, his/her needs, wishes and interests (Kegan, 1982, 1994). The individual's sense of self is enduring, concrete, external, subject to

rules and authority (Kegan, 1982) and organized and understood by concrete attributes and events, observable actions and behaviours (Popp & Portnow, 2001). The individual thinks in categories and is not capable of abstract thinking (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 1988). The individual has his/her own plans and purposes and can recognize that others have the same.

The main challenges with this way of knowing stem from conflicting perspectives between the individual and others with regard to fulfilling needs and meeting goals (Kegan 1982, 1994). Events, experiences, and feelings are evaluated in terms of whether or not the individual's own personal goals are being met (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009).

In the *instrumental* meaning system, daily life is guided by a dualistic sense of right and wrong and arbitrary either/or distinctions. Interactions with others reflect a tit-for-tat kind of mentality, e.g. 'If you like me, there's a better chance that you'll help me get/do what I want. If you don't like me, you won't help me get/do what I want.' Interactions with others are understood in terms of their concrete elements (the facts of what transpired), the concrete give-and-take (what I help you with, what you help me with), and concrete outcomes (I get a better grade)" (Popp & Portnow, 2001, p. 55). Individuals tend to describe themselves in concrete or behavioural terms, focusing on physical characteristics, likes and dislikes, the kind of car they drive, the type of job they have, and so on (Popp & Portnow, 2001).

In a study of adult learners in an ESL (English as a Second Language) program, students who were assessed as functioning within the *instrumental* meaning-making system described their cohort as a learning environment where they could compare their ideas to those of other people. They identified that the support from their cohort members was important, and support was described in concrete terms, using examples such as helping pronounce words correctly, offering friendly encouragement, and helping with homework (Kegan et al, 2001).

### **Socialized Meaning-Making System**

At the *socialized* stage, the self is a reflection of the relational realm (Drath, 1990). Individuals have developed the capacity to internalize, and identify with, the values and beliefs of significant others. Within this stage the individual has developed the capacity for abstract thinking, to 'think about thinking'. The individual is able to reflect upon his needs, wishes and interests and to have an internal dialogue about himself (Kegan,

1982, 1994). *Socialized* individuals can simultaneously consider their own perspective and that of someone else, and can put the needs of others ahead of themselves in order to remain connected (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009).

The cost of this developmental capacity, however, is that individuals with this meaning system are unable to separate their own sense of self from the values, beliefs and judgments of significant others and they view the world through their relationships (Kegan, 1982, 1994). *Socialized* individuals are subject to the ideology of influential others (Drath, 1990) and others are perceived as co-constructors of the self and as sources of authority (Popp & Portnow, 2001). “Other can be relational – important people in one’s life, whether friends, colleagues, teachers, supervisors, anyone in a position of authority. Or “other” can be ideational – religious, political, philosophical. Whatever the nature of the other, a person with a *socializing* way of knowing gets from it a sense of self, a sense of identity, belonging, validation, acceptance; a sense of sameness, of commonality, of shared experience with others” (Popp & Portnow, 2001, p. 56). In the *socialized* system, individuals tend to describe themselves in abstract terms, such as “I am a shy person,” “I am sensitive,” “I am thoughtful.”

Individuals with a *socialized* way of knowing experience others as responsible for their feelings, and assume responsibility for the feelings of others (Lahey *et al*, 1988). They are focused on abstract psychological consequences: “Am I still a good person?” “Am I meeting his expectations of me?” “Does she still like/love/value me?” “Do I still belong?” (Popp & Portnow, 2001). They need a clear sense of what is expected of them by others, feel a strong obligation to meet those expectations, have little tolerance for ambiguity, and rely on external authority and important others for standards, values, acceptance, belonging, and sense of identity (Popp & Portnow, 2001).

In the *socialized* meaning system individuals experience criticism as destructive to the self; if others do not like what they said/did/are it means they are not a good person (Popp & Portnow, 2001). Individuals are focused on identifying commonalities and feeling a sense of shared identity and purpose.

In the study of adult learners (Kegan *et al*, 2001), those with a *socialized* way of knowing were oriented towards discussing the internal thoughts and ideas of their peers. For example, they talked about the importance of their relationships, and accepting and valuing each other as key outcomes of the learning process. An essential feature of them feeling comfortable in the learning environment was a lack of conflict, as they perceived

any form of conflict to represent a breach of the mutuality and loyalty they searched for in relationships.

### ***Self-Authoring Meaning-Making System***

Within the *self-authoring* system, individuals move beyond being subject to the expectations of others (they no longer *are* their relationships, they *have* them) and develop an autonomous self. This new self therefore has the ability to regulate and evaluate its own values, goals and interpersonal connections, and individuals in this meaning system can transcend their own needs and those of others in accordance with their own personal value system (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009). The individual is able to release the other from the responsibility of being their co-constructor of reality (Lahey *et al*, 1988) and has developed the capacity not to assume responsibility for others' responsibilities (Drath, 1990). In other words, they do not blame others for their own thoughts or feelings and are able to identify "who owns the problem."

The *self-authoring* system can also hold contradictory feelings simultaneously, and is characterized by "its capacity to take responsibility for and ownership of its own internal authority; its capacity to internally hold, manage, and prioritize the internal and external demands, contradictions, conflicts, and expectations of oneself and one's life" (Popp & Portnow, 2001, p. 57). Individuals at this stage of meaning-making have the capacity to create and preserve roles and regulate relationships (Kegan, 1994). *Self-authoring* individuals are concerned with consequences related to personal integrity and meeting their own standards: "Am I competent?", "Am I living/working/loving up to my full potential?", "Am I upholding my own values and standards?" (Popp & Portnow, 2001). Others are perceived as autonomous entities, and the perspectives of others are integrated into individuals' own internal systems. In the *self-authoring* meaning-making system, differences of opinion are considered a given and are used as opportunities for growth. Criticism and feedback are evaluated and used according to the individual's own internally generated standards and values (Lahey *et al*, 1988).

The limitation at this stage is that individuals are subject to the ideology of their own identity (Drath, 1990) and the internal guiding principles they have created and subsequently invested in maintaining psychological control over their autonomy (Kegan 1982, 1994). Threats to their identity are therefore threats to 'the cause.' Individuals in

this stage are not able to reflect on their underlying ‘guiding principles’ (A. Howell, personal correspondence, March, 2011).

In the aforementioned study of adult learners (Kegan *et al*, 2001), *self-authoring* individuals experienced conflict with their peers as an inevitable and necessary part of the learning process. Their relationships with each other, while considered important and valuable, were viewed more as a means of enriching their own understanding and experience – the process of working together was important because it provided a broader context for articulating, discussing, and challenging their own thoughts and ideas (Kegan *et al*, 2001).

### ***What are the ramifications for practice?***

Some of the responsibilities of child and youth care workers, such as following a daily routine, and participating in social, recreational, and educational activities, may be viewed as achievable from a *socialized* way of knowing. Most demands on practitioners, however, such as setting limits, establishing boundaries, developing and maintaining therapeutic relationships, engaging purposefully in the life space, using Self, dealing with aggressive and threatening behaviours, responding to pain, working in ambiguity, and facilitating experiential learning, appear to require a *self-authoring* mind.

To cope with the emotional demands of the job, child and youth care workers are often provided with specific skills training, educated on the importance of self-awareness, and coached on the need to identify their “triggers” – primarily so that they will not get drawn into power struggles with the young people, or engage in counter-aggression. While this may be helpful, it presupposes that practitioners have the ability to identify their emotional response to the young person as separate from the young person – and this requires a particular way of knowing (and type of self-awareness) that they might not yet have developed. This speaks specifically to the possible impact of practitioners’ developmental capacity on their experiencing of and ability to cope with their own and the young peoples’ pain and pain-based behavior. The capacity to manage pain may be related to the ability to think complexly. According to Kegan (1994), “the demand that we be in control of our issues rather than have our issues control us” (p. 133) is a demand for a *self-authoring* system of meaning-making.

Having the ability to transcend our own needs and focus on the needs of the young people requires that we first have the ability to separate our own needs from the needs of

others. This is only possible, from a constructive-developmental perspective, if one has developed the capacity to do this – which would only occur when one is making meaning at the *self-authoring* stage. Providing skill-based training on dealing with aggressive behavior, for example, will not do much to address the fundamental problem if the demands of the job exceed one's developmental capacity to meet them. The concepts taught in training will simply be interpreted through the individual's existing logic.

In order to establish and maintain boundaries, child and youth care workers must have the ability to be fully present in interactions with the young people while also being able to suspend their own needs and focus on meeting the needs of the young people (Mann-Feder, 1999). Setting limits and maintaining boundaries consists of “the continuous creating and recreating of roles rather than just the faithful adherence to the demands within them” (p. 96). According to Kegan (1994), limit setting requires *self-authoring* mental complexity. It is important to recognize that practitioners who have difficulty setting limits or preserving boundaries are not necessarily in need of new skill development. Rather, the way in which they are making meaning may limit their capacity to recognize situations in which limit setting might be necessary. It may be the inability to have a relationship to their relationships that creates this limitation (Kegan, 1994).

### ***What are the implications for training?***

Ultimately, the goal of all child and youth care training is to help equip practitioners to work effectively with the young people and families in their care. When viewed through a developmental lens, this requires that training is both competency-based and transformational. In other words, how training is delivered is just as important as what is taught.

Participants will take different things from training depending on their experience and where they are developmentally. For example, in a study that explored participants' experiences in a Tavistock Conference (a very self-directed, open-ended learning environment) those making meaning at the *socialized* level found the conference to be very unsupportive, to the extent that three of them actually walked out of the conference (Silver, 2001). Alternatively, *self-authoring* individuals characterized the same environment as supportive and growth enhancing. Silver surmised that the Tavistock conference did not provide adequate *holding* for most participants functioning at the *socialized* order.

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