

Relational Child & Youth Care Practice

Volume 31 Issue 2 / 2018



ISSN 2410-2954



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Relational & Youth **Child Care** Practice

(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”.

Abstracted and indexed at **Proquest** – Applied Social Sciences Index (ASSIA)

Relational & Youth
Child Care
Practice

ISSN 2410-2954 Volume 30 No.3

Being *'more'*?

Heather Snell

As an Editor with *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, reflection is not an unusual activity. Currently I have been reflecting on RCYCP issues 28-1 and 28-2 entitled Transitions, and Beginnings. Hard to believe, but it has been three years since RCYCP transformed from a paper journal and into our current digital online format; and three years since I began my role as Editor. I find myself thinking about how much I have learned from RCYCP readers, writers and contributors. I have been challenged by ideas, theories, practices, and ways of caring that were beyond my limited experience. I have been introduced to students, practitioners, researchers, young people and their families – people passionate about sharing their knowledge, wisdom and life experiences. I have had curiosity piqued and my passion for Child and Youth Care (CYC) sustained. When I think about my role as Editor however, it occurs to me that the most frequent feedback I offer to authors submitting work to the Journal is to ask them to about how they could make their submission *more relational*.

More relational? More? I wonder about how, or even if there is such a thing as being *'more'* relational? What does this mean? Certainly, this feedback is not offered to encourage authors to 'pump up the numbers' – CYC practice is not about the number of relationships. Am I asking writers to 'super-size' their relationships; to make the relationships they write about seem bigger and more meaningful? No. We know relationships grow and are given meaning in context. Often brief relationships have incredible impact, and the impact of a lasting relationship may not be revealed until long after the relationship has ended. Then what could I possibly be asking of RCYCP authors

when I suggest they write *more* relationally? After three years as Editor of RCYCP I wonder when it comes to being relational – can we be ‘more?’ I know being relational requires a conscious awareness of moment to moment experiences. It is an intentional commitment to ‘how we are’ when we are together. It is a commitment to being contextual – demanding that we acknowledge uncertainty, complexity and variety as normative. CYC writers have long described being relational as “the in-between and co-created between us” (Garfat, 2008). CYC theory describes “relational practice as a dynamic, rich, flexible, and continually evolving process of co-constructed inquiry” where “meaning emerges within the ‘space between’ the individual, family, or community” (Bellefeuille & Jamieson, 2008, p. 38). So then – back to my feedback seeking ‘*more*’ relational voices. Who are these voices and how do they inhabit the “in-between spaces” and the “co-constructed inquiries” in this issue?

Zainab Virjee seems to have written her article “A Deep Dive into The Journey of a Muslim CYC Practitioner,” as a personal search for these spaces. Zainab asks, “How am I relational?” Her personal reflection as a Muslim woman explores the intersection of her faith, her personhood and her role as an emerging CYC practitioner – asking questions about the impact of her identity on her practice, on her self and on the relationships she experiences within her practice. Emmie Henderson-Dekort also writes about impact in her article “Unheard Voices within Family Law, Custody, and Access: A Progression of Child and Youth Care Practice and Children’s Rights.” Informed again by experience, Emmie’s writing describes the impact of the lack of children’s voice in custody and access proceedings. Observing that custody and access processes and decisions are not mere transactions, but rather complex and dynamic relationships, Emmie enabled me to think about the co-created space between self, the child and the larger systems we must navigate together. As if by application Nancy Marshall, Falon Wilton and Shauna Weinroth, respond with “It Is Our Turn! Autistic Young People Inform Praxis and Policy.” By giving and sharing voice Nancy, Falon and Shauna describe how relational experiences together can be ‘more’ when advocating for systemic policy and practice change.

Nancy, Falon and Shauna’s experiences provide an interesting platform for Hailey Kavanagh’s inquiry into how we teach relational practice in CYC education. In “Considering the Tension Between Theory and Practice in Child and Youth Care,” Hailey asks about the relationships between CYC educators and students, as she considers the tensions between CYC theory and practice. Hailey’s writing challenged me as a CYC educator to think more deeply about how I am with other faculty and with students. Again

– as if call and response – Matty Hillman offers a first-person re-telling in his article “CYC Education Day: Reflections on Experiences”. Through his eyes as a former CYC student, a CYC practitioner and now a CYC educator, Matty observes that CYC educators have been ‘using experience to teach practice for years now’ – encouraging students, practitioners and educators all to hold onto the idea of learning through experiences that are co-created and shared. Education, learning and meaning making through relationship is given further application by Peter Lebuis who writes about a very personal aspect of self rarely considered in CYC literature – humour. Sharing humour, and that quaint way of being together through ‘letter writing’ helped me to think about the diverse nature of relationships beyond the ‘in person’ and often narrowly defined ‘therapeutic’ defaults that so frequently and rigidly pervade much of CYC practice and literature.

Although all these articles challenged and deepened my understanding of CYC relational practice – it was the authentic conversation between James Graham, Jordan Hightower and Wolfgang Vachon that provided me the most compelling and relational response to being ‘more relational’. Speaking directly and in the first person, James observes “it is sort of a strange way of saying it ... it’s understanding even if you don’t understand”. Well said James. Understanding even when I don’t understand ... one cannot be *more* relational than that.

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Relational & Youth
Child Care
Practice

ISSN 2410-2954 Volume 30 No.3

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The CYC-Net Press

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ISSN 2410-2954 Volume 30 No.3

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ISSN 2410-2954 Volume 30 No.3

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