

Relational

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ASPECTS OF
RELATIONAL PRACTICE



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Old and New Relationships

Jaspreet Bal and Aurrora De Monte

Relationships have always been at the core of Child and Youth Care (CYC) Practice, and at the heart of this journal. As new members of the team of editors for this journal, we wanted to introduce ourselves at the formal start of this relationship with you the reader. I (Jaspreet Bal) am a CYC practitioner and professor with a radical community-based practice serving otherwise underserved populations across North America. I (Aurrora De Monte) am a community based CYC practitioner and educator interested in exploring the uniqueness of CYC education and practice.

As new co-editors, we are excited about bringing our lens to the collaborative project that is this journal; we are honored to facilitate the many voices that reflect and add depth to this field. For our first round at editing, we have had the invaluable guidance of Thom Garfat, who guest edited with us and showed us the process. We also had the tireless support of Rika Swanzen, Martin Stabrey and Heather Snell. We would like to especially thank Carina Lewis for without her, none of this would have been possible.

The start of our relationship with the journal threw us right into the heart of the matter: relational practice. Relational CYC 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). This definition comes alive when it is applied by practitioners across the globe. We put out a call, asking folks in the field to share with us how relational practice was being refined and evolved. We wanted to know what the concept looked like in diverse context.

We welcomed contributions that returned to this central idea, and those that expanded beyond it.

The result is this issue. A mix of voices looking at what relational practice means around the world.

In his piece *What Keeps us From Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, James Freeman looks at barriers to effective practice. Exploring our need to hide, our tendencies to react and our quickness to blame, Freeman guides practitioners to the possibility of authentic relational practice. His work provides clear questions and prompts us to engage with his writing.

From the archives, James Freeman also provides for us a revision of Henry Maier's *Core of Care*. This revision maintains Maier's voice and definitions of fundamental components of caring practice, while updating the language in the aim of ensuring inclusivity and accessibility to this classic article. He provides a much-appreciated discussion guide for practitioners and educators to utilize in supporting deeper reflection and understanding in core aspects of relational practice.

Jack Phelan shares his expertise in *Thinking About Relational Practice*. He brings forward threshold concepts in the field and invites the reader to think about things like intentionally ineffective relational practice, role modelling, and other-awareness. His introduction of these concepts provides an opportunity for discussion and growth of forever evolving relational concepts.

In *Aspects of Relational CYC Practice*, Alfred Harris contributes examples of what a journey with relational practice meant for him in South Africa. In an honest look at his time in the field Alfred challenges the hegemony of the global north and demonstrates the many non-linear ways that relational practice has come to have weight in a South African context. Diving specifically into the aspects of relationship, trust, acceptance, and advocacy, Harris honestly shares his journey so that other practitioners can incorporate these elements into this work.

Another perspective is brought to relational care in South Africa by Nandisa Sigwili and Leon Fulcher in their work *Safeguarding the Relational Guardians of African Children and Young People Living in Places of Safety Care*. Having established relational practice as the core of CYC work in South Africa, the authors move to a conversation on what this looks like when accounting for the cultural and physical safety. They pose a series of relational questions which reveal real areas of work for moving forward in the safeguarding of young people.

From across the globe, John Digney and Maxwell Smart share their Celtic wisdom in *The Might of Wee: Thinking and Creating One-Degree Shift*. With humor, insight, and a collective sixty years of practice, they posit that what a one-degree shift can mean for a boat, a relational moment can mean for a young person. Their contextual navigation metaphors offer a push to CYC practitioners to honor the power they have in the small or ‘wee’ moments of life.

How these small relational moments play out in larger political systems is explored by Jennifer Wade-Berg, Kathleen Skott-Myhre and Hans Skott-Myhre. They push practitioners to consider collegial relationships and the role that race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation play in *Intersectional Collegiality: Relations with Ourselves*. Citing the women of color that use intersectionality to push that the personal is political, the authors bring the conversation on relational practice into an overtly political realm and demand institutional accountability as well as a reframing of collegial relationships.

Alyssa Martinez explores how various aspects of our identity influence the supervisory relationship in her article *Bringing Identity into Supervision*. By sharing personal learning as a supervisor and supervisee, Martinez encourages us to facilitate critical conversations that nurture a strong awareness of our identities, exploring how this impacts daily practice and most importantly our supervisory relationships with one another.

In *Politicizing CYC: An integral aspect of Relational Practice*, Shadan Hyder, Nancy Marshall and Matty Hillman contextualize relational practice as a politicized practice. The authors outline critical questions that encourage reflection on power, privilege and systemic injustices in our community and within the systems in which we work, inviting us to join in creating change within our communities and CYC practices.

In *Together we are Stronger*, Barrie Lodge asks us to think about the application of relational practice within our relationships and the spaces we hold with one another as colleagues. He reminds us that our community is one that is full of beauty, love and connectedness, and that we too, must nurture this ‘family’.

We sign off with contributions from our regular columnists. This issue Sheva Leon shares her review of Kiaras Gharabaghi’s *A Hard Place to Call Home*, approaching the book as a frontline practitioner and an academic. Garth Goodwin writes solemnly about the complexities of our field, highlighted by past and present tragedies in *Senseless*. He reminds us that we have to take up the fight to ensure safety and create change in our care systems.

We are inspired by the submissions and the engagement in critical and reflective inquiry regarding aspects of relational practice. We want to thank you for welcoming us into this shared space and we hope to continue to push the boundaries of CYC practice and education, encouraging and nurturing this vibrant, global community.

Reference

Garfat, T. & Fulcher, F. (2012). Applications of a CYC Approach. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 24(1-2).



Dr. Jaspreet Bal

is a Professor in the Child and Youth Care program at Humber College in Toronto. A community organizer and educator, her practice involves radical youth work with underserved populations across North America. Bal serves on the Board of Directors of the Sikh Feminist Research Institute and the advisory for the World Sikh Organization. She is also on the advisory board of the Sikh Research Institute.



Aurora De Monte

graduated from the University of Victoria with a Bachelor's in Child and Youth Care and a minor in Indigenous Studies in 2008. Her practice has involved a variety of community and school-based programs/agencies. Currently, she is full time faculty in the Child and Youth Care program at Fleming College, and supports young women and families involved in the justice system, as well as works as an independent practitioner within a private practice. Aurora is completing her MSc in Child and Youth Care Studies at the University of Strathclyde and their dissertation explores relational teaching in Child and Youth Care.

Aurora is passionate about advocacy as it relates to Child and Youth Care practice, including legislation and professionalization.

What Keeps Us from Relational Child and Youth Care?

James Freeman

Abstract

This article examines three barriers to effective relational Child and Youth Care: (1) Our need to hide which keeps us from being with others, (2) our tendency to react which keeps us from interpreting our context and experiences, and (3) our quickness to blame which keeps us from doing actions that benefit others. Recognizing and adjusting for these barriers can improve our quality of caring.

Key words

Child and Youth Care, relational practice, barriers to effective care, quality care

We've come a long way in defining relational Child and Youth Care (CYC). Our scope of practice reminds us that relationships and the use of daily life events remain at the core of our work. Our foundational competencies remind us that relationship and communication are of critical importance in our practice. There have also been some deeply valuable writings and discussions on self and the intersection of self with another. We're not afraid (or at least shouldn't be) of integrating things we know from science (such as brain functioning or the impact of trauma), things we've learned from experience (such as how to form mutually respectful relationships or how to reflect on the impact of self in relationship), and what we discover about ourselves (such as our own strengths, vulnerabilities, habits, and passions).

With all of this knowledge and understanding I wonder why we don't see more authentic relational care in action. There certainly are places where relational care is both the aim and the reality. I've seen and experienced many of them. Others, both people and

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programs, get enthusiastic about relational care, but existing systems or other factors remain barriers to real and lasting patterns of caring in a relational way.

The twenty-five characteristics of relational Child and Youth Care (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi & Fulcher, 2018) provide us with the building blocks of what it takes to care for one another in a relational way. When organized into the themes of being, interpreting, and doing (Freeman & Garfat, 2014) they give us a framework to guide, reflect on, and improve our work. This has been applied to various contexts such as trauma, family systems, supervision, and more.

The way in which we choose to be with others, meaningful interpretation of what is occurring, and intentionality in what we do can become our central ways of living out relational care on a daily basis. It's what people facing complex challenges in life need from us and it positions us as a collaborator rather than expert. When we think about what prevents us from deeply focused and effective work it's easy to blame the team, the program, the system, or any number of other convenient targets. Looking inside ourselves can be instructive and helpful in our own journey and commitment to becoming more relationally centered in our acts of caring.

While there are many factors related to relational Child and Youth Care and the being-interpreting-doing framework, it is worthwhile to consider how our need to hide keeps us from being, our tendency to react keeps us from interpreting, and our quickness to blame keeps us from doing.

Our Need to Hide Keeps us from Being

The characteristics that support a relational way of being are easy to describe. Love, hanging out, flexibility, being in relationship, working in the now – these are not obscure concepts. They are also deep, complex, and take experience to develop and use well.

A possible trait or action that keeps us from a relational way of caring is when we hide. Our hiding from others becomes a barrier to caring effectively. Think of all the various ways of hiding we either do ourselves or see in others. Sometimes it's literally hiding in the office from the events of the day or during a conflict. We hide behind rules ("Sorry, I don't make the rules"). We sometimes hide out of the fear of being seen and known by others. For some of us it's fear of being seen by the child ("Am I worthy of them trusting me?") or family ("Will they think I have what it takes to help them?") and for others it's being known by our peers ("What will they think of me?"). When our decisions

and actions are driven by fear we retreat as a way to create a feeling (although false) of safety.

Another reason we sometimes hide is because we're not aware of or trusting in our own strengths. Each one of us has amazing inner resources and unique gifts to bring to others. When we don't see them or when we begin to doubt them it becomes difficult to use and share them.

There's a difference between retreating for a break to catch our breath, re-center and take care of ourselves as opposed to running away because we're uncomfortable or facing something unknown. The prior should be regular practice for us. When we do the latter, we may need deeper reflection about what's driving us in this way.

Sometimes we hide out of concern about balancing or separating personal and professional lives – as if we have two separate lives. You've heard this when people say, "I don't bring my personal life to work" or "I leave everything from work at work". Of course, relational care involves complex, fluid boundaries and we do work in specific roles in the lives of others. The reality is we bring our whole self to every interaction whether we're aware of it or not. The focus here is on being who we are in a genuine, authentic, relational way. Not in trying to become someone else in order to do our job. In a beautiful moment of musical creativity Alicia Keys and Willow Smith remind us of this simple path¹:

I just want to be myself
I don't want to be anyone else
I just want to be myself
I just want to be ah ah ah ah ah.

Don't hide who you are. Just be you. Be intentional in the way you make yourself available to others and nurture human connections. The biggest effect hiding has on our work is that it prevents authenticity. When we hide, we all miss out on each of us being our genuine, unique self and what that brings to the moment. Relational care pulls us out of our ways of hiding and pushes us to lean into ways of being that truly connect and deeply care.

¹ See this beautiful moment unfold between the two at <https://www.facebook.com/officialwillow/videos/911937639181295>

Our Tendency to React Keeps us from Interpreting

Interpreting and thinking about what we do and how we do it is integral to a relational approach to caring. The characteristics most closely related to interpreting our world and work include meaning making, strengths, needs, context, developmental responsiveness, and others.

Caring is challenging, demanding, and can be (especially in group settings) fast and furious. If we're not able to respond quickly to changing circumstances we can find ourselves facing long, difficult days full of frustration and attempting to catch up. An absence or lack of thoughtfulness can leave us in a reactive state where we are simply responding to others or what is going on in the immediate environment. You see this in action when a co-worker becomes overwhelmed and begins to say or do things they know aren't helpful, and worse, are totally contrary to their values and usual approach. We've all been there at times. But some stay there and don't come back. Living and caring in a reactive state is no good for the child or us.

There are certainly times where a quick reaction is necessary – a child running into traffic or breaking up a fight can leave little time for reflecting on all the options available. Yet, unless we've done some deep work to integrate a relational approach into our personal life and work, when we are reactive, we tend to lean on less effective methods and fail to take into account what is best for that particular child or situation. Reaction is automatic and involves little to no thought. Interpreting the moment through a relational lens – however quickly time might allow – allows us to be more effective in our support and nurture of others.

Supervisors have a particular responsibility to create space and time where workers can think and reflect. This may be in a team meeting, during individual on-the-go conversations, or tasks to reflect on between times of more formal supervision. Regardless of the quality of supervision, practitioners still have a responsibility to notice, reflect, and adapt their approach based on who is part of the interactions, the environment around them, and the individual goals of the child or family.

Our Quickness to Blame Keeps us from Doing

Relational Child and Youth Care is an active effort. Caring requires doing something. Although we all know moments where we have been passive or 'rolling with it' in the moment, on a deeper level there were intentional actions to shape and influence (or not) the interaction or situation. Without doing nothing gets done. Characteristics that relate

to the theme of doing include emotional presence, rhythmicity, engagement, doing with, rituals, activities, and more. These all begin to shape the activities that others might be able to see or feel when they observe acts of caring.

When we get stuck in patterns of blaming others it becomes a barrier to the 'doing' aspect of the being-interpreting-doing framework. You may recognize this sometimes in words like: "She needs to meet us halfway", "They need to tell us what their needs are", or "He's not open to change at all". Subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – blaming of others. A belief behind a statement like these is that the child or the family member is responsible, not us. Relational care is different. We are compelled to move in a way that meets the child, not wait for them to come to us. There are certainly times where the best support for a child is to sit still and be silent. But even in these times the choice is intentional and active for a purpose.

If our 'ways of being' are the heart, and our 'interpreting' is the mind, then 'doing' is the hands and feet. Relational practice involves us getting up, moving toward, and meeting others where they are. Our responsibility to act doesn't excuse the child or family member from their own responsibility and agency. We are not responsible for the choices and decisions others make, yet relational care involves the responsibility to influence and care actively. We get caught in excusing our own inaction by blaming others for their lack of interest or engagement. It's unhealthy, potentially harmful, and the opposite of the 'doing' aspects of relational care. Effective practitioners are committed to more action and less blaming.

It's Our Time

The deepest wounds in human experience come in the context of relationships, yet so do the greatest moments of healing and transformation. We strengthen our usefulness in relational Child and Youth Care when we move from hiding to being, from reacting to interpreting, and from blaming to doing. In a world that is impacted by loss, discrimination, abuse, violence, and other trauma it is our time and our responsibility.

Questions for Individual or Team Reflection

- How strong is your commitment to the work of relational Child and Youth Care?
- What are some internal barriers that have kept you from growing even more in your relational approach?
- When was a time you noticed a colleague acting in a way that was less than relational? What do you suspect might have been driving their approach? How do you see patterns of hiding, reacting, and blaming surface in your work with others?

On hiding

- What are some of the ways you have tended to hide from others? What is keeping you there?
- What can you do today to take a step toward living more authentically?

On reacting

- What people or situations tend to push you into a reactive pattern? How can you prepare for or adjust your thinking to make this different?
- What cues do you recognize in yourself when you are being reactive, rather than responsive in your work?

On blaming

- Who or what have you blamed in the past that have kept you from taking responsibility for your own actions? What can you do to shift this from blame to personal responsibility in the future?

- Which action-oriented characteristics of relational care might you focus on in exchange for less blaming of others (such as emotional presence, rhythmicity, engagement, doing with, rituals, activities, etc.)?

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James Freeman, MA, CYC-P

lives in southern California and has worked in direct practice and leadership roles for over twenty-five years. He is a consulting editor for CYC-Net and can be reached at james@cyc-net.org

Information

Relational Child and Youth 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".

Certain pieces in *RCYCP* have received peer review. However, we do not peer review all articles as we choose not to exclude those voices where peer review would be inappropriate or on request from writers.

Publishers

The CYC-Net Press

PO Box 23199, Claremont, 7735 SOUTH AFRICA

<http://press.cyc-net.org> email: info@press.cyc-net.org



Editors

Rika Swanzen, PhD

Associate Professor and Academic Cluster Manager: Human and Health Sciences, Monash South Africa.
Chair: Education, Training & Development: South African Council for Social Service Professions.

Jaspreet Bal, PhD CYCP

Professor, Child and Youth Care, Humber College, Ontario, Canada

Aurora De Monte, MSc

CYC Faculty, Child and Youth Care Program, Fleming College, Ontario, Canada

Senior Editor

Thom Garfat, PhD

Transformation International, Quebec, Canada

Editorial and Administrative Officer

Carina Lewis

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Jack Phelan, Co-Chair, Child and Youth Care Program, Grant MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta

Jennifer White, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, British Columbia

James Freeman, Director of Training, Casa Pacifica, California, USA

Correspondence

All correspondence should be addressed to: *The Editors, Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*
e-mail: rcycp@press.cyc-net.org

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Relational Child & Youth Care Practice welcomes submissions on all aspects relating to young people, families and communities. This includes material that explores the intersectionality of Child and Youth Care practice and the lived experiences of all who are engaged in Child and Youth Care practice. Considerations will also be given to interpersonal dynamics of professional practice and all submissions that assume a relational perspective. This might include topics such as cultural values, ethics, social policy, program design, supervision, education, training etc. Welcomed are also submissions that address advocacy, social justice and reconciliation practices within the diverse spaces and places of Child and Youth Care. Each issue may include refereed articles that comply with acceptable ‘academic’ standards; submissions contributed by regular and guest columnists; short pieces that describe particular relational experiences and reflections; poetry; artwork and photographs.

Material should be submitted by email to rcycp@press.cyc-net.org in standard word processing format (eg .doc, .rtf). Formal articles should not exceed 6000 words in length. Referencing should conform to either APA or Harvard format. Author-date citations should be used within the text and a double-spaced reference section should accompany each article. In all submissions, authorship details including an abstract of no more than 150 words should be included, as well as a short list of keywords at the beginning of the article, a headshot photo and a short author bio of about 100 words to publish with your article. Importantly, authors should also indicate whether a peer review is required (in addition to the standard editorial review).

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Relational Child and Youth Care Practice may include Peer Reviewed contributions, stories, case studies, thought pieces, experiential descriptions and other forms of writing which will not be peer reviewed. In this way we aim to strike a balance between the values of Peer Reviewed articles and experiential voices from the field. This is a unique approach and one which we feel offers the best of both. Peer Review is available on request.

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Relational Child and Youth Care Practice

email: rcycp@press.cyc-net.org

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