

# **Child and Youth Care in Practice**



**Thom Garfat, PhD and Leon C. Fulcher, PhD**  
**Editors**



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The CYC-Net Press

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ISBN 978-1-928212-08-9

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**An imprint of Pretext Publishing**

PO Box 23199, Claremont 7735, Cape Town, South Africa

<http://cycnetpress.cyc-net.org>

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# Hanging In: Child and Youth Care in Practice

As the field of Child and Youth Care has evolved, it has become increasingly possible to find applications of a Child and Youth Care Approach in a variety of settings all over the world – in daily community work and direct practice settings, in education and training, in management and supervision, in outcome recording and research as well as in policy-making. As we demonstrate in the opening chapter of this volume, Child and Youth Care involves a way of being in the world. It is more than a set of techniques, a label attached to practitioners, or a way of thinking about working with children, young people and families. It is, rather, about how one chooses to be in the world with others. As we have said elsewhere Child and Youth Care practice is about:

How you are

Who you are

When you do

What you do

The term Child and Youth Care is, for us, a broad, encompassing and relevant term for all of us who are, as they say in the United Kingdom, working ‘at the coalface’, in direct work with children, youth, families and those who support them. It includes then, for us, Child and Youth Care Workers, Foster Carers, Educators, Social-pedagogues, Justice Workers, and all who are engaged in this work. It is not limited by job title but is, rather, inclusive by function.

As you read through the chapters in this book, do not look just at what the authors are writing about – but let yourself notice ‘how’ they are doing the work they are doing and ‘how’ they are writing about it. Notice

the presence, the rhythmicity, the being with people, and the focus on the relational. And while these are, indeed, identified as being Characteristics of a Child and Youth Care Approach, they are also characteristic of a particular way of being with people when one wants to be helpful.

In this volume you will find material from Canada, the USA, the UK, New Zealand and South Africa which illustrates something of the broad geographic expanse of Child and Youth Care practice. The areas of focus cover everything from youth work and residential care, foster care, management and supervision, to the use of theatre, football, and activity-based interventions all of which highlight diverse areas of practice.

Note especially the chapters on Outcomes that Matter which, through direct links to the therapeutic use of daily life events (a defining characteristic of CYC practice) demonstrates a framework for recording and reporting about the weekly achievement of resilience outcomes by children and young people in out-of-home care. In this it connects the CYC approach to being with young people to a system of recording important outcomes of that work.

In this, as in many of the other chapters, we see how the Child and Youth Care approach is influencing other 'areas of practice', like recording, observation, evaluation, activity planning, teaching, research and, literally, all aspects of our work with children, youth, families and others. If you are doing the work described in these chapters, in a manner that reflects the underlying principles, then you are engaged in Child and Youth Care practice.

Like all forms of helping, Child and Youth Care remains in a state of continuing evolution. We hope it stays that way – for if it were ever definitively captured in writing then it would mean that our field of practice had become static. That would stifle the creativity and flexibility which children, young people and families need from us in an ever-changing world.

Read carefully the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter on the *Characteristics of a Child and Youth Care Approach* before reading other chapters in this book. This introductory chapter provides you with a framework for reading the other chapters and, through knowing this chapter well, the others come into even clearer perspective. As you come to know the characteristics, you will be able to identify them, even when they are not made explicit, in the rest of the chapters.

As mentioned earlier, Child and Youth Care is in constant evolution – which means that the future will be different than today. Many of the

chapters in this volume hint about that future through proposing new ideas, as new ways of thinking are evidenced and as new conceptualizations of practice appear. While reading through this volume, let yourself wonder ‘*if this idea was taken further, what might be the result?*’ The future is not only yours to dream about, it is also yours to create.

We are grateful to all of our colleagues who have contributed to this volume. Many of the writings here were originally published in the Canadian journal *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice* (24 1/2) and we are grateful to *RCYCP* and the individual authors for allowing their reproduction here. The authors worked hard to create their own special contributions which illustrates their commitment to supporting Child and Youth Care Practitioners – the world over – to address the ever changing demands of our field. And, as leaders and innovators in the field, they demonstrate the potential inherent in the field.

Read and enjoy.

*Thom and Leon*



# 1

## Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach

Thom Garfat & Leon Fulcher

**Abstract:** *This chapter updates the characteristics of a Child and Youth Care approach as previously defined in the literature and practice of the field. Recognizing the fluid and ever-changing nature of Child and Youth Care practice, 25 characteristics of contemporary Child and Youth Care practice are identified.*

### Introduction

Child and Youth Care workers are ideally situated to be among the most influential of healers and helpers in a person or family's life. That statement represents our basic orientation towards Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice.

It was not that long ago that the work that Child and Youth Care Practitioners do was considered a sub-profession and the workers themselves were considered simply to be extensions of other helping professionals<sup>1</sup>, most commonly Social Workers (Garfat & Charles,

1 In their investigations into why foster care placements succeed or fail, Sinclair *et al* concluded that “*foster care is certainly seen as benign. Its carers are commonly seen as ‘the salt of the earth’.* However, they are neither acknowledged as responsible parents nor treated as responsible professionals” (2005: p. 233).

2010). But with the passage of time and the evolution of a distinct method of practice, Child and Youth Care (CYC), and CYC Practitioners, have come to be recognized as possessing a specific expertise and a unique approach to working with children, youth and families (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008; Garfat and Fulcher, 2012; Garfat, 2004a). It is worth noting how the European profession of *social pedagogy* accommodates “service provisions such as child care, youth work, family support, youth justice services, secure units, residential care and play work – services that to British [or North American] eyes, appear somewhat disparate” (Petrie, Boddy, Cameron, Wigfall & Simon, 2006, p. 21). A CYC approach addresses the same wide spectrum of services for children, young people and their families.

A CYC Practitioner’s position in the daily life of another person, or their family, allows her to intervene proactively, responsively and immediately to help the other person and/or other family members to learn new ways of acting and experiencing in the world (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008). There is no other form of intervention which is so immediate, so grounded in the present experiencing or, one might say, so *everyday*. This immediacy of intervention creates in-the-moment learning opportunities (Ward, 1998) allowing the individual to experiment with new ways of acting and experiencing as they are living their lives. CYC practice is not oriented around temporally spaced and infrequent visits to an office where the ‘client’ meets with a therapist who has no experience of that individual’s everyday life. Rather it is based on being *in-the-moment* with the individual(s), experiencing with them their life and living as it unfolds (Baizerman, 1999; Winfield, 2008).

Child and Youth Care practice is based on helping people live their life differently as they are living it (Garfat, 2002). It is a focused, timely, practical and, above all, immediately responsive form of helping which uses “applied learning and daily uses of knowledge to inform more responsive daily encounters with children or young people” (Fulcher 2004, p. 34). It is immediate and focuses on the moment as it is occurring. It allows for the individual to learn and practice new thoughts, feelings and actions in the most important area of their lives – daily life as they are living it.

A number of years ago, Garfat (2004a) identified characteristics, drawn from the literature of the field, which were thought to define a CYC approach to helping. This set of characteristics was subsequently updated by Fulcher and Garfat (2008) when writing about the applicability of a CYC Approach in Foster Care work. Some of what follows is based

on those earlier efforts. In this chapter those earlier descriptions are extended, based on continuing experience and changing realities in the field. CYC practice is a rapidly evolving field and constantly changing approach to working with people (Garfat, 2010).

A shift is also made in this chapter from using the term Child and Youth Care worker to the term *Child and Youth Care Practitioner*, a shift which further represents the evolving nature of CYC practice as expressed in the literature of the field (Gharabaghi, 2009; Phelan, 1999; 2009). This reflects the growing expansion of the field into all areas of service and implies inclusiveness, a joining together, of all who work in the field. Thus, one might be, for example, a CYC worker, a CYC instructor, a CYC family worker, a CYC trainer, a CYC researcher, a CYC Supervisor, etc. What binds them together as CYC *Practitioners*, is the CYC approach to their work. Thus, CYC Practitioners are connected by how they think about and carry out their work. CYC is, after all, an 'approach' or a way of working and being in the world with others.

### **Relational Child and Youth Care Practice**

It is common in the field to speak of *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice* in which the focus of attention is directed towards 'the in-between between us' (Garfat, 2008) or as it is reframed here, the '*co-created space between us*'. As Bellefeuille and Jamieson noted "relational practice is a dynamic, rich, flexible, and continually evolving process of co-constructed inquiry. In this type of inquiry, meaning emerges within the 'space between' the individual, family, or community" (2008, p. 38). This is a central feature of effective CYC practice. This *co-created space* represents the 'hub of the wheel' around which all other characteristics of practice revolve. We often call this co-created space between us *the relationship* and this involves more than just 'having a relationship' (even a good one) with the other person. Rather, it means that the Practitioner is constantly attending to the *co-created space between us*, wondering – for example – 'is it a safe place?', 'is it a learning space?' or 'is it a developmentally appropriate place of experience?' The focus, then, is on the characteristics of the co-created relationship, not on the individuals in the relationship.

This focus on the '*co-created space between us*' ensures that the CYC Practitioner remains attentive to the mutuality of relationship, recognizing that both parties to the relationship create and are influenced by it (Fewster, 1990, 2001). Stuart has said the "the relationship is the intervention" and this focus on the relational helps to ensure that the CYC

Practitioner maintains this focus (2009, p. 222). Smith's re-thinking of residential child care arrived at similar conclusions, arguing that "building appropriate relationships and using these to help children as they grow up is the primary endeavour" (2009, p. 120). In the following, some 25 *characteristics* of a Relational CYC approach are identified and highlighted.

## **Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach**

***Participating with People as They Live Their Lives.*** Child and Youth Care involves *being with* and participating with people in the everyday moments of their lives. Whether it is with a family in their home as they are doing dishes or playing soccer with a young person in the community park, or chatting with a homeless youth on the streets of a major city; whether it involves hanging out with a mother in jail, helping a supervisee learn a new skill, pausing at a desk with a student, or participating with a young person in a church activity; whether it involves being in the sandbox, on the football field or sitting with a child as she falls asleep after a difficult day – CYC Practitioners involve themselves in all aspects of the daily life of the people with whom she or he works (Fulcher & Ainsworth, 2006; Hilton, 2002; Smart, 2006). When a CYC educator, for example, encounters a student in the cafeteria in a college setting, that educator responds to the student from a CYC perspective. When a CYC Practitioner on the streets encounters a young person, that worker remembers, as a CYC worker engaging with this person, to interact using the characteristics of a CYC approach. The worker attends, for example, to a young person's relationships with the other inhabitants of their street life. Central to a CYC approach is the idea that if people can change how they are, in the minutia of their lives, then change will be all the more enduring for their relationships are central to who they are and how they are in their world.

***Rituals of Encounter*** require that CYC Practitioners give conscious thought to the ways in which they engage with another. This involves giving respectful attention to important protocols associated with engaging with someone from cultural traditions that are different from one's own (Fulcher, 2003). Simply trying to understand, as well as contemplate different relational starting points can present major challenges. One's own personal experiences of acculturation and socialisation impose taken-for-granted assumptions and a cognitive mindset that is not



easily altered. Rituals of encounter between Practitioner(s) and children or young people have developed through cultural protocols. The meaning a child or young person gives to culture – including youth group or gang culture – is constantly evolving as they seek to understand and adapt to their current predicament and any new living environment or experiences. Each encounter requires that a *cultural lens* be included in a CYC Practitioner’s essential toolkit of competencies. Like transitional objects, rituals of encounter strengthen purposeful communication.

**Meeting Them Where They Are At.** Meeting people ‘where they are at’ (Krueger, 2000) involves being with people where they live their lives but also more than that. It means accepting people for how they are and who they are as we encounter them. It means responding appropriately to their developmental capabilities, accepting their fears and hesitations, celebrating their joys and enabling them – without pressure – to be who they are in interactions with them (Small & Fulcher, 2006). As Krueger said, interventions must be “geared to their emotional, cognitive, social, and physical needs” (2000, n.p.). Just as a forest guide must meet others at the beginning of their journey, so does the CYC Practitioner meet the other “where they are at” as they begin the journey and then move on together from there.

**Connection and Engagement** builds from the notion that if someone is not connected with another, and/or if one cannot engage with him or her in a significant way, then the Practitioner’s interventions cannot be effective (Garfat & Charles, 2010). It is unacceptable to blame ‘the other’ when they are unresponsive; it is the Practitioner’s obligation to work towards such connection. All too often, a failure to connect or engage gets rendered as a diagnostic justification for ‘what’s wrong with the other person’. Relationship is the foundation of all CYC work and connection is the foundation of relationship (Brendtro & du Toit, 2005). The Practitioner connects with the person, and then engages with them as they live their lives. Helping a young woman nurse her child, assisting parents to prepare the garden, teaching a young man to shoot a basketball ... all such engagements are powerful when one is connected in relationship with.

**Being in Relationship** is not the same as ‘having a relationship’. Everyone has relationships but ‘being in relationship’ means engaging with the other person in a deep and profound manner which impacts both

young person and helper (Gannon, 2008). A CYC Practitioner recognizes that they live in a relationship with a person where each has contributed to making that relationship what it is (Fewster, 1990). It also means engaging in relationships and being in these relationships over the course of time. Relationships build up a history and that history continues to shape the relationship and our being in that relationship. Writing about UK social work practices with young people in care, Thomas came to similar conclusions about the importance children give to relationships including “the continuity of this relationship, reliability and availability, confidentiality, advocacy and doing things together” (2005, p. 189). As Fewster said, “Being in relationship means that we have what it takes to remain open and responsive in conditions where most mortals – and professionals – quickly distance themselves, become ‘objective’ and look for the external fix” (2004, p. 3).

***Using Daily Life Events to Facilitate Change.*** Child and Youth Care work involves using the everyday, seemingly simple, moments which occur as CYC Practitioners live and work with people to help them find different ways of being and living in the world (Maier, 1987). These moments – as they are occurring – provide the most powerful and relevant opportunities for intervention for change. Whether it be an opportunity-led event (Ward, 1998) with a child in a residential program or foster home, a life altering moment in working with a family (Jones 2007; Shaw & Garfat, 2004), a brief encounter on the street (Apetkar, 2001), or a simple exchange in a rural college classroom (Shaw, 2011) – the moment, and its potential for powerful change, is seen as central to a CYC approach. Child and Youth Care Practitioners are, in essence, defined in their work by the way they make use of these moments.

***Examining Context*** requires one to be conscious of how everything that occurs does so in a context unique to the individual, the helper, the specific moment of interaction and the history of such interactions (Krueger & Stuart, 1999). While some elements of context may be the same (e.g., national and regional policies, agency philosophy, regulations, physical environment, etc.) other elements of context (e.g., cultural traditions, personal histories of being cared for, previous relationships with adults, developmental stage, etc) vary with the individual interactions between CYC Practitioner and the other person (Fulcher, 2006). The interaction, for example, between a university student and a CYC instructor is contextualized by the meaning of education to both

participants, the power in the relationship, the structures and expectations of the university, the philosophies about education and everything else which impacts on the moment of interaction. Thus, no two contexts can ever be the same and the CYC Practitioner is constantly examining all these elements so as to 'understand the moment' more fully.

**Intentionality** means that everything a CYC Practitioner does is done with a purpose (Molepo, 2005). There are few 'random' actions or interventions. It means thinking consciously about what is required for the other to be comfortable with intentional attempts at making connections. All the Practitioner's interventions are planned and fit with the regularly reviewed goals established with the young person and/or their families. When a community-based CYC Practitioner meets with a family in their home, it is important to decide how each individual will be greeted on arrival, who will be greeted first and how one will be with them. A CYC Practitioner facilitating a training program needs to decide how the group will be greeted, how individuals might be singled out for attention, etc. No matter where CYC Practitioners work, what they do is always intentional. This does not mean that one abandons spontaneity. But even in the moment of spontaneity, the Practitioner continues to reflect on their intention(s) in the moment. This is, in essence, reflective CYC practice.

**Responsive Developmental Practice** means that the CYC Practitioner attends to the relevant developmental characteristics of the individual (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008; Maier, 1987). Rather than simply reacting to their behaviour, she or he responds to the person's needs in a manner which is proactively consistent with their developmental stage and needs (Small & Fulcher, 2006). Here one considers development not from a chronological perspective but rather from a capacity perspective, thus enabling the Practitioner to consider the person as an individual with strengths and challenges in different areas since nobody develops consistently across all areas of their potential. When thinking of families, the Practitioner also considers their developmental stage and potential, recognizing that not all families develop according to some predetermined plan.

**Hanging Out** means that much of the CYC Practitioner's time is spent doing apparently simple, everyday (yet extremely important) things with people (Garfat, 1999). To the outsider it may seem as though nothing is

happening. A walk in the park or sipping tea with a family; kicking stones with a young person; chatting in the corridor with a student; or leaning on a street lamp chatting with a homeless girl – all may seem like ‘doing nothing’ when, in fact, these may be the most important of activities. During such moments and experiences of ‘hanging out’ one is investing in the work of building relationships of trust, safety, connectedness, and intimacy. And this takes time – something often missed as finance controllers scan quickly through monthly and yearly accounts. These are the very types of relationships which are necessary if the Practitioner is to become a significant and influential person in the life of others (House of Commons Select Committee, 2009; Redl, 1951).

***Hanging In*** means that the CYC Practitioner does not give up when ‘times are tough’. Rather, one hangs in and works things through, demonstrating commitment and caring for that child, young person or parents and family members (Gomph, 2003). This is especially so when working with young parents who are placed together with their children in care. The traumatized child or young person in a foster home who is struggling, the Aboriginal youth seeking to re-connect with cultural traditions, the student who is failing to grasp a concept, the parent who keeps slipping back to their old ways of behaving, the research subjects who find difficulty appearing for the interviews – for CYC Practitioners these are signs of the need to *hang in*. It requires that one be patient and move at the other’s pace rather than the Practitioner’s own pace (Fulcher, 2006). Equally, when the times seem good, the Practitioner does not automatically assume that ‘all is well’. Steckley and Kendrick (2008) highlighted implications associated with ‘holding on’ while ‘hanging in’; signaling the importance of safe forms of restraint as extreme examples of this characteristic. One must recognize that when the times are good, set-backs may be just around the corner. After all, learning and changes take time.

***Doing ‘With’, not ‘For’ or ‘To’*** refers to how CYC Practitioners engage with people, helping them to learn and develop through doing things with them. This does not deny them the prospect of learning and growing through doing everything for them, especially when they are capable of doing it themselves (Delano & Shaw, 2011). Nor does one stand back and do things to them (such as ordering them about). Ultimately one remains engaged ‘with’ people through the process of their own growth and development, walking alongside them as a guide. This process of

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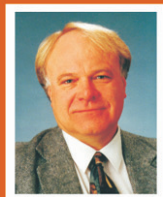
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ISBN 978-1-928212-08-9



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