# RELATIONAL ARTS-BASED TEACHING & LEARNING: ENGAGING MIND, BODY, & SOUL

A PRIMER FOR CHILD AND YOUTH CARE EDUCATORS

GERARD BELLEFEUILLE KERRY HEANEY-DALTON REBECCA STILLER

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## DEDICATIONS

To my lifelong mentors and friends Dr. Frances & Dr. Jim Ricks:

I will not forget the sacrifices, Appreciating is the least I can do, For choosing to walk with me, I salute you. Nothing can repay what you have done for me, My mentor, my light. Thank you for the empowerment, Thank you for opening up your life to me, Thank you for your time, Thank you for lifting me up, My mentor, my light.

#### Gerard Bellefeuille

To my CYC students to whom I entrust the future. Your courage, honesty, support, and patience allowed me to learn. And to my CYC colleagues, whose unwavering care brought joy and inspiration every day. I am grateful and forever changed.

#### Kerry Heaney-Dalton

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# Dr. Kelsey Reed

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# MacEwan cyc Team & Stydents

## CONTENTS

#### DEDICATIONS

#### FOREWORD

#### PREAMBLE (p. 1)

### CHAPTER ONE (p. 7) Introduction: The Ontological Relational Self

The Ontological Independent Self The Ontological Relational Self The Neurobiological Evidence of Relationality The Whole Me: Embodied Ways of Knowing Closing the Factory: 21st Century Learning

#### CHAPTER TWO (p. 17)

#### Arts-Based Teaching and Learning Pedagogy: Students Are More Than Their Brains

Encouraging Students to Think About Themselves as Artists Making Space for Alternative Ways of Knowing Awakening Students' Appreciation for Social Justice

#### CHAPTER THREE (p. 24)

# **Relational Praxis: A Critical Thinking Threshold Concept**

Relational Praxis: Knowing, Being, Doing

- The Knowing
- The Being
- The Doing

Owning my Relational Praxis Arts-Based Learning Activity Examples of Student Work: Owning My Relational Praxis Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER FOUR (p. 37)

#### Naming My Gremlin: Attending to the Relationship Between Emotional Self-Efficacy and Academic Performance

Naming My Gremlin Arts-Based Learning Activity Examples of Student Work: The Gremlin Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER FIVE (p. 47) CYC Practice Self-Portrait: A Visual Journey of Self-Investigation, Self-Projection, and Identification CYC Practice Self-Portrait Arts-Based Learning Activity Examples of Student Work: CYC Practice Self-Portrait Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER SIX (p. 78)

**Creative Journaling: Tapping into the Aesthetic Dimensions of Knowing** Creative Journaling Arts-Based Learning Activity Examples of Student Work: The Lifeline Examples of Student Critical Reflection Examples of Student Work: Creative Journaling Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER SEVEN (p. 89)

#### Arts-Based Methods Course-Based Research: The Interconnection Between Creative Inquiry and the Meaning-Making Process

Arts-Based Research Learning Activity Examples of Student Work: Course-Based Research Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER EIGHT (p. 100)

#### **Creative Learning Portfolio: Synthesis and Reflection**

Creative Arts-Based Learning Portfolio Examples of Student Work: Creative Learning Portfolio Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER NINE (p. 109)

#### Tapping Into the Affective Domain Through Films, Music, and Stories

Sense-Based Knowledge and Emotional Appeal Asynchronous Discussion Forums Part One: Tapping Into the Affective Domain Through Film and Film Clips Examples of Student Responses and Peer Feedback Part Two: Tapping into the Affective Domain Through Music Examples of Student Responses and Peer Feedback Part Three: Tapping into the Affective Domain Through Story Examples of Student Responses and Peer Feedback Examples of Student Responses and Peer Feedback

#### CHAPTER TEN (p. 133)

#### Field Seminar: The North Star of Authentic Learning

Groundwork Assessment Transition and Closure Examples of Student Work: Field Seminar Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER ELEVEN (p. 150)

#### Place-Based Identity Mapping: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Arts-Based Pedagogy

Identity Mapping Learning Activity Examples of Student Work: Place-Based Identity Maps Examples of Student Critical Reflection

#### CHAPTER TWELVE (p. 156)

#### Shifting Paradigms: Connecting Assessment, Aesthetics, and Meaning-Making

Finding the Mother Tree Shifting Paradigms Assessment of Arts-Based Learning Creative Arts-Based Online Discussion Forums Examples of Grading Rubrics

- The Creative Arts-Based Learning Portfolio
- Creative Arts-Based Reflective Journal

#### **CHAPTER THIRTEEN (p. 167)**

#### Passing the Torch: Settings Intentions for the Future

ABOUT THE authors (p. 171)

REFERENCES (p. 174)

#### FOREWORD: JENNY MCGRATH

Welcome to Arts-based Teaching and Learning: Engaging Mind, Body, and Soul! This book is written as an invitation into an introspective journey.

Relational child and youth care practice is nuanced, making it challenging to describe and understand. The Child and Youth Care Program pedagogy at MacEwan University is centred on the principle that learning about child and youth care ought to be felt and embodied because once truly experienced, it can be shared with intention with children, youth, and families. This book illustrates how we explore relational practice alongside students, with mutually beneficial results.

Theoretical concepts are intertwined with vivid examples of student's creative work. These illustrations show deep personal exploration and critical examination of ideas, resulting in learning that is meaningful and transformative. You may be surprised by the vulnerability and honesty, but after leaning into their own creativity, students describe increased self-awareness and capacity. Students also gather an array of interventions that can be used in their work, and because of their personal application and understanding, the usefulness is evident. As you read, you will likely find yourself pondering the pertinence of the examples to your life and work. Allow yourself to engage in ways that are meaningful to you, and you may be surprised by what you notice. One of the many advantages of relational arts-based teaching and learning is the transferability of the creative process.

I am grateful for what I have learned about myself and others from being in child and youth care. I recognize and appreciate the privilege of working alongside people as they live their lives, often during their best and worst moments. Reading this book brought back fond memories of how activity and arts-based interventions generated space for relational connections across practice locations. I hope you, too, become lost in a memory, reflect on your own experiences, and are invigorated to try something new!

Congratulations to all who contributed to this informative resource!

## "PICASSO ONCE SAID THAT 'ALL CHILDREN ARE BORN ARTISTS; THE PROBLEM IS TO REMAIN AN ARTIST AS WE GROW UP.' I BELIEVE THIS PASSIONATELY—THAT WE DON'T GROW INTO CREATIVITY; WE GROW OUT OF IT. OR RATHER, WE GET EDUCATED OUT OF IT." SIR KEN ROBINSON



# PREAMBLE

"EDUCATION IS NOT THE FILLING OF A PAIL BUT THE LIGHTING OF A FIRE." WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS



Pangea: The Emergence of Self – Jordan Grant

Welcome! In turning the cover page, you have just entered a relational space where we hope you will linger a while, perhaps be primed (pun intended) to explore some fresh and unique ideas about teaching and learning, and at the very least, leave with some magical, studentgenerated examples of transformative relational arts-based learning experiences that are useful to you.

This collaborative primer draws on our more than forty years of collective experiences as Child and Youth Care (CYC) educators in postsecondary settings and in supporting students as they discover the practical application of their learning in field practicums and subsequent professional employment in the larger community. Though we are rooted in the discipline of CYC, we hope to capture interest across varied relational disciplines, including social work, education, nursing, and early childhood studies. Ultimately, we write with the goal of sharing our insights into the use of relationally informed arts-based teaching methods with any educator who has curiosity and a passion for discovery. No worries if you've been told you are not artistic or feel uneasy about artistic expression; most students initially feel that way, too.

As a holistic alternative approach to teaching and learning in postsecondary education, we put forward a theoretical case for moving beyond our reliance on more traditional, transmission-based teaching methods. Drawing upon the literature on relational ontology as well as arts-based teaching and learning pedagogy, we offer this primer as a bridge for those who want to move away from conventional teaching methods but are unsure of how to do so. We are guided by the central belief that we are not fundamentally rational, freestanding, selfsufficient, autonomous, ego-based human beings, as Descartes concludes in The Meditations, but that there is a grander, more intuitive, and holistic description of the human condition that is relationally constituted and views learning as a co-constructed relational process.

Our point of departure is the view that any conversation about effective teaching methods must consider not only how students learn but what we take as evidence that meaningful growth and deeper understanding has occurred. Rather than what Descartes implied, we hold that education is not simply a rational intellectual endeavor. It's true essence is collaborative, emotional, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual. Thus, resulting in an experiential and relational journey for both students and educators.

Let us be transparent that our central ambition in sharing this work is to showcase the value of incorporating relationally informed arts-based methodologies, activities, and assessments to shift and transform teaching and learning. We believe that when we create and embrace opportunities to engage mind, body, and soul in the educational context, students are free to both learn and unlearn. It is critical to convey that we do not see these methods as add-ons to existing workloads but alternate ways of recognizing and valuing the growth potential in all students, rather than just those able to demonstrate success in traditional academic mediums.

While we have provided theoretical support for our argument, we are not interested in excessive theorizing nor posting a work merely for academic consumption. Instead, our hope is that this primer will ignite possibilities and kindle a fire within new educators and ultimately anyone looking to do things differently.

We hope that as you engage with this primer, you will move forward with a sense of excitement and adventure. With any pedagogical shift, there may be discomfort, as the current realities of neoliberal academia do not always support pedagogical experimentation, tending instead to reward academic tradition rather than creativity in post-secondary institutions. Current paths to tenure can cause faculty to think they need to stay in one lane to lessen the risk of criticism. In researchintensive universities. faculty energies are directed toward research and not into stoking the fire for teaching excellence. In his book Uncertainty: Turning Fear and Doubt into Fuel for Brilliance, Jonathan Field (2012) talks about the fluttery stomach butterflies that people experience when they feel anxious or nervous and notes that many people tend to run from the discomfort and uncertainty of those flutters:

ULTIMATELY, TEACHING EXCELLENCE IS ABOUT SEEING ONESELF AND ONE'S STUDENTS AS DYNAMIC CONSTELLATIONS OF EXPERIENCES, EMOTIONS, BELIEFS, DREAMS, FEARS, AND HOPES AND MEETING THEM THERE.

"If only we'd learned how to harness and ride rather than hunt and kill the butterflies that live in the gut of every person who strives to create something extraordinary from nothing" (p. 27).

As you move through the primer, what we are encouraging is an openmindedness to overcome the boundaries of conventional thinking found in all professional cultures in the form of absolute certainties or supposed truths that disrupt and impede change. Recognizing, too, that there is a self-protective nature in the teaching space that parallels students' initial tendency to try to avoid conflict and confrontation as they enter professional practice. These insecurities, often accompanied by gut flutters, must be embraced and examined for continued growth and relational connectivity to take place.

As educators, the three authors have evolved substantially over our academic careers, theoretically and as human beings. What we have come to understand and greatly appreciate about the art of teaching excellence is that, like any other authentic human venture, it emerges from one's inwardness. We believe that teaching excellence can never truly be achieved through technique alone. As Oscar-winning filmmaker Daniel Kwon (Everything, Everywhere, All at Once) conveyed in his 2023 acceptance speech, true genius emerges from the collective as we are all products of context, descendants of something and someone that must be acknowledged. Ultimately, teaching excellence is about seeing oneself and one's students as dynamic constellations of experiences, emotions, beliefs, dreams, fears, and hopes and meeting them there.

Now that we have shared our intent in collaborating on this project, let's explore what each of these thirteen chapters holds. Chapter One highlights ontological contrasts between Western and non-Western cultures in understanding the concept of personhood, which we refer to as self throughout this primer. We explore the influence these different points of view have had on both how we teach and how students learn. Chapter Two shifts to a discussion of relationally informed, art-based pedagogy to enrich the teaching and learning environment and explores how, through multiple creative formats, students can demonstrate what they feel, think, and question in new and intriguing ways through multiple creative formats. Relational praxis as a critical thinking and consciousness-raising threshold concept is unpacked in Chapter Three. Here, we offer you the first taste of relationally informed arts-based teaching and learning activities, assignments, and assessments that we have successfully used with our CYC students. Chapter Four showcases Naming My Gremlin, a creative arts-based assignment designed to help students identify self-limiting thoughts and feelings and gain more emotional self-efficacy, a vital component of academic engagement and performance. Chapter Five demonstrates how the use of an arts-based CYC practice self-portrait assignment establishes a creative context for students to engage in critical self-reflection, challenge their assumptions, and visually illustrate their journey as evolving relationalcentred CYC practitioners. Creative arts-based journaling, the subject of Chapter Six, delves further into the aesthetic dimensions of learning that give rise to a more holistic and deeply interpersonal reflective journey for CYC students, in which knowing, being, and doing become inseparable. In Chapter Seven, we present course-based research projects that employ creative arts-based modes of inquiry for both the process by which the research is conducted and the methods used to represent research data. We also discuss the interconnection between creative inquiry and meaning-making, which is central to relational CYC practice. The process-oriented learning portfolio assessment highlighted in Chapter Eight gives insight into how a creative space for experimentation, where students are free to express and explore their own uniqueness and alternative views, makes way for critical thinking

and self-directed learning. Chapter Nine contains three sections: films, music, and narrative. Here we highlight how each approach helps students absorb abstract concepts and connect with emotional experiences and subject matter designed to promote introspective discussion and encourage curiosity, openness, and confidence. As we explore in Chapter Ten, the intensity of field education meshes well with expressive arts. Included are examples of how we share leadership opportunities with students, which generates more nuanced and complex ways for them to represent their praxis in the field as they take authentic ownership of their internal and relational experiences. We believe Indigenous ways of knowing have long-informed relational artsbased pedagogy. Chapter Eleven delves into how we can use this natural connection as part of an ethical and culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning that engenders intercultural understanding, reconciliation, and social justice. Chapter Twelve is a look at how relationally informed arts-based learning assessments are both formative and summative and share a common purpose: to provide supportive feedback to students on the learning process and stipulated learning outcomes. Chapter Thirteen closes our discussions by setting our intentions for the future.





# CHAPTER ONE

# THE ONTOLOGICAL RELATIONAL SELF

"IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE." ALBERT EINSTEIN



"The metaphorical infinite ocean and the fishing represent theories of knowing (epistemology) and theories of being (ontology) and the multiple kinds of epistemological and ontological nets individuals design." - Jennika Kuruliak

### INTRODUCTION: THE ONTOLOGICAL RELATIONAL SELF

Suppose imagination is more important than knowledge, as Einstein believed. In that case, it is of value to reflect on how educational institutions have evolved to be devoid of imagination and, even more importantly, how the people who teach and learn within those institutions have been denied a whole human experience. To begin, acknowledgement and exploration of the fundamental differences between cultures in how knowledge is constructed, what constitutes effective teaching, and what we take as evidence that deep learning has occurred is helpful. One such distinction relates to how the concept of personhood—which, from this point on, will be referred to as the self is understood. The history of these different positions can be derived from Markus and Kitayama's (1991) research on the cross-culture comparison of self-construal, which focuses on how people understand themselves in relation to others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) emphasize that cultures that tend to be collectivist in character maintain a view of the self as interdependent, relational in nature, and inseparable from social context. By contrast, largely individualistic cultures often hold a central view of self-interested, autonomous beings detached from the external world. It is, therefore, not unexpected that the dominant pedagogical paradigm of education in individualistic cultures often tends toward ontological individualism or ontological realism.

While there are many explanations of ontology, it can be defined in its basic form as fundamental, taken-for-granted assumptions about the ultimate reality of things, and of particular importance for CYC education, what constitutes the self, i.e., what it is to be a human being (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010).

## THE ONTOLOGICAL INDEPENDENT SELF

In simple terms, ontological individualism asserts that the world and reality exist independently of the observer and their interpretations (Cohen et al., 2007). It is the belief that the world is comprised of objective facts or truths which allow all human beings to experience a common reality (Acher et al., 2016; Boyd, 1984; Bhaskar et al., 2018). It also holds the view of people aka the self, "as independent, selfinterested, disembodied, and ego-based" (Bellefeuille et al., 2017, p. 47). Although the first stirrings of modern individualism are traceable to the pre-Socratic philosophers and the early Christian doctrines (Heath, 2019; Nashef, 2019), it is French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist René Descartes who is considered the protagonist of ontological individualism (Baker & Morris, 1996). In his Meditations (1641), Descartes argued that the natures of mind and body are completely different from one another and that each could exist by itself. He believed that it was only through rational thought that one could arrive at the truth and regarded the perceptions of the senses as questionable (Skirry, 2005). Martinez, Mansaguiton, Mercado, and Panes (2019) explain Descartes's doubts regarding the use of the senses to understand truth by citing his wax metaphor:

Descartes argues that the senses are the means of knowing a piece of wax, its properties, characteristics and physical attributes. However, when fire melted the wax, its attributing properties changes. Though our sense does not see the wax in its original form, we still know that it is wax. Our understanding of the piece of wax then proves that the thing we believe and understood before through our senses is not reliable. Our senses are extensions of our body that would only see measurable things just like that of wax but we did not understand what wax is because we did not scrutinize it using our reasons. (pp. 31-32)

For Descartes, our most authentic self is discovered not through relationships and interactions with other human beings and the world around us but through introspection. Captured in his most famous

phrase, "Je pense, donc je suis" ("I think, therefore I am"), this limited idea continues to set the groundwork for many modern education systems. From our first school days through higher education, teaching and learning have often been designed to impose content on students (Wood et al., 1976). Despite the very best intentions and practices of many educators, if the primary purpose of our education system is the discovery of objective truth, there is potential for creative imagination and deeper relational connection to be limited (Wayland, 1866). The experience of pedagogy structured around ontological individualism is spectacularly depicted in Pink Floyd's classic music video "The Wall" (1979). A searing critique of factory-like structured education, this video highlights the disturbing lack of creative freedoms students are permitted as they are disciplined to become homogenized products of a colourless school system. Hearing the stories of thousands of students over our collective years in post-secondary education, we have found that this representation of education is a reflection of many students' experiences. In the article "21st Century Child and Youth Care Education: An Ontological Relational Turn in Teaching and Learning," Bellefeuille and Berikoff (2020) have this to say:

"... one-way transmission of knowledge from educator to student based on methods of rote learning and memorization in which conventional testing methods (e.g., multiple-choice exams, quizzes, academic papers) are used to produce high-performing, autonomous, and rational individuals. The successful student is the one who can correctly identify what is important and communicate it back to the instructor." (p. 15)

They go on to claim that, tied to the pressures and influences of an individualistic and reductive system of higher education, even CYC education programs designed by those who should know better have inadvertently adopted transmission-based pedagogies with an excessive focus on the head. All too often, these result in physical and psychological health consequences:

"How often have we, as CYC educators, watched students walk around like zombies, feeling emotionally stressed out because of the disembodied process within which they are taught? This disengagement is a direct result of an education model founded upon ontological individualism, which takes little account of the characteristics of individual learners or the distinct prior knowledge and motivation that each person brings to the learning encounter. This form of education transforms learners into empty containers to be filled by educators, resulting in the dehumanization of both the students and the teachers." (p. 15)

While this version of the self has often governed how educators teach and students learn, an alternative ontological stance, informed by the growing body of relational ontology scholarship, asserts that what primarily exists are not entities such as things and independent human beings but relationships.

## THE ONTOLOGICAL RELATIONAL SELF

From a relational ontological perspective, the self is relationally constituted; and as such, considers relationships as the foundation for optimal learning (Downie & Llewellyn, 2011). It is essential to understand that this view does not reject the unique existence of the individual; those traits, goals and aspirations, experiences, interests, and behaviours that differentiates the person from others, but rather understands the self as a process of relatedness (Stetsenko, 2016). Stated differently, the self is understood to be not so much a personal possession, but rather a reflection of one's lifelong relational experiences" (Bellefeuille et al., 2017, p.47). Ken Gergen (2009) insists that our relationality with others is fundamental to our very being: without it, we cannot be.

"It is not individual minds who come together to form relationships; it is out of relationship that individual functioning emerges." (p. 298)

Educational scholar and feminist Barbara Thayer-Bacon (2017) expands upon the notion of relational being by arguing that relational ontologies are non-dualistic ways of understanding the world that "emphasize we are w/holistically connected with our greater universe, materially and spiritually" (p. 7). Sidorkin (2002) also concludes that the self is a means of connection among relations with humans, things, and nature. Before going further, we ask you to recall a time in your life when you were alone, surrounded by nature or simply in your favorite place to escape from the crowd. You might consider the last time you were on a hike in the mountains, sitting in the spray as waves crashed into the ocean, or catching the sun's warm rays through your window. If you take a few moments to self-reflect, you will likely agree that, even when alone and physically isolated from others, solitude can be profoundly relational. The point is that we are always in a state of interconnectedness with other people and our surroundings. Because, as humans we are relational to the very core of our beings, we are even relationally interconnected with the rest of the cosmos in the form of the air that we breathe and the water that we drink. For example, when we push our way up that mountain, we are affected by the air we inhale and modify the air that others breathe when we exhale. Perhaps we distribute seeds from one place to another on the soles of our boots. When we absorb the sun's rays, our bodies produce chemicals that positively impact our mood and mental health. Scholars such as Morton (2018) and Latour (2004, 2018) argue that a view of the natural world as separate from human beings is not only ethically unsound but empirically false. They note, for example, how microorganisms in our gut aid digestion, pollinators such as bees and wasps help produce the food we eat, and photosynthetic organisms (such as trees and phytoplankton) provide the oxygen that we need to live. The interconnectivity of self, nature, and others is nicely summarized by Ingold (2000), who writes, "by separating the natural and social, the world becomes something that humans live on, not in" (pp. 214–215).

This notion of human-environment relationality is also linked to the African Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes that the fundamental condition of the individual is an intrinsic connection to other people, places, and spirits of ancestors (Battle, 1997). In his book No Future Without Forgiveness, Desmond Tutu (1999) writes:

"Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, "Yu, u nobuntu"; "Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu." Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share." A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are ortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are." (p. 31) As Gergen (2009) notes:

"...virtually all intelligible action is born, sustained, and/or extinguished within the ongoing process of relationship. From this standpoint there is no isolated self or fully private experience. Rather we exist in a world of co-constitution. We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship; even in our most private moments we are never alone." (p. xv)

This acknowledgement of our essential non-separateness from the world reveals that knowledge and learning are not simply a discoveryoriented and co-created process but, instead, are inherently embedded within social relationships and thoroughly contextualized within one's social and cultural context.

## THE NEUROBIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF RELATIONALITY

The ongoing advancements in neuroscience research have produced a substantial body of scientific evidence that supports a relational view of the self (Courtney & Myer, 2020; Hari & Kujala, 2009; Thompson, 2017). One of the most enlightened insights from neurodevelopment research on human growth and development is the striking notion that the mind is inherently social and learns within relationships: that physical sensation and emotion are essential components of the mind, as integral to thought and learning as logic (Damasio, 2003; Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999). Perhaps the most significant general conclusion to be drawn from the current neuroscience literature is that there is no single brain structure that embodies the self (Plinio et al., 2020). Evan Thompson (2014), author of Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, asserts that neuroscience shows that the brain and body are in constant flux, linking the Buddhist belief that our self is everchanging to physical areas of the brain. According to Thompson (2017), self-processing is not embodied in any one region or network of the brain. He asserts that it extends to a broad range of fluctuating neural processes that do not appear to be specific to the self.

## THE WHOLE ME: EMBODIED WAYS OF KNOWING

Embracing a relational ontological approach to teaching and learning fundamentally alters how curriculum is conceptualized. In our experience, curriculum in post-secondary education is traditionally applied across distinct dimensions, including objectives, content and subject matter, methods and procedures, and assessment; by comparison, a relational ontological conceptualization seeks to expand how we see the curriculum by emphasizing the totality of the learning process. Instead of regarding knowledge as information that can be stockpiled within a (disembodied) mind, learning within a relational ontological perspective is understood as the development of embodied ways of knowing or being (Ingold, 2021). The idea of learning through the total being swaps a linear approach based on predetermined expectations (e.g., student achievement) for a holistic view of teaching and learning that seeks the broadest development of the entire individual by focusing on the relationship between the head, heart, and soul, all considered essential components of the learning

THE IDEA OF LEARNING THROUGH THE TOTAL BEING SWAPS A LINEAR APPROACH BASED ON PREDETERMINED EXPECTATIONS (E.G., STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT) FOR A HOLISTIC VIEW OF TEACHING AND LEARNING THAT SEEKS THE BROADEST DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENTIRE INDIVIDUAL BY FOCUSING ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HEAD, HEART, AND SOUL, ALL CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE LEARNING PROCESS.

process (Bellefeuille & Bekikoff, 2020), especially in Child and Youth Care programs. Following this reasoning, in his essay "Vertical Literacy: Reimagining the 21st-Century University," Scharmer (2008) calls for a shift in higher education from teaching the mind to learning with the heart. Scharmer explains that learning from the heart embodies an affective form of understanding or awareness that differs from pure cognitive

awareness or analytical knowing. He urges higher education institutions to move from the ego to co-awareness: a shift that he explains will allow us to radically reconnect with each other, our planet, and our evolving human consciousness. The notion that the heart plays a major role in the learning journey is also a deeply held epistemological belief of Indigenous ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002). Appreciating that there is considerable diversity among Indigenous Peoples, and therefore, among Indigenous way of knowing, teaching, or learning, Indigenous scholars acknowledge that there are some notable commonalities among Indigenous epistemology (Battiste, 2002; Ermine, 1995; Sammel, 2005). One such commonality is the epistemological principle of heart wisdom or spiritual ways of knowing (Doetzel, 2006). In addressing twenty respected Indigenous knowledge keepers and renowned scientists at a aathering in Turtle Lodge located in Sagkeen First Nation in 2017. Indigenous knowledge keeper Chief Darrell Bob of the ST'at'imc Nation declared that "The longest journey we will ever make as human beings is the journey from the mind to the heart". In making this statement, Chief Darrell Bob was not suggesting that learning from the heart was about eliciting positive and compassionate feelings. The heart that Chief Darrell Bob acknowledged was related to the existence of a deeper portal of profound interconnectedness and awareness that exists between humans and all living things. However, to access this portal, one must shift from the style of thinking that often occupies the modern individualistic mind.

## **CLOSING THE FACTORY: 21ST CENTURY LEARNING**

Today's post-secondary graduates participate in communities that are radically diverse, often uncertain and unpredictable, and extremely complex. In this rapidly evolving twenty-first century landscape, postsecondary institutions are preparing students for a future driven by a globalized, technological, and diverse world order that has revolutionized—and continues to revolutionize—how we communicate, encounter and engage with others, rear families, and work. The late Sir Ken Robinson, perhaps the world's best-known education luminary, spent a lifetime making a case for an educational revolution. His TED Talk "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" is the most watched of all time with more than seventy-two million views. For Robinson, reforms to our current model of education would result in an improved but still-flawed system that has already reached its limits and is now woefully out-ofdate. At the 2016 annual Big Picture Learning conference, "Big Bang," Robinson explained that "If you design a system to do something, don't be surprised if it does it" (as cited in Schartz, 2016, para. 2). Robinson critiques two core principles of traditional education systems:

conformity and compliance. He argues that by emphasizing conformity to standardized curricula, teaching methods, and behavioural norms, the system stifles students' natural curiosity, enthusiasm, and intrinsic motivation for learning (as cited in Schartz, 2016). Robinson goes on to insist that creativity in the twenty-first century is crucial and that students will need to become passionate and collaborative learners, traits that the current system of higher education, which he compares to a "factory model," does not promote.

The factory model of education is based on two dominant learning paradigms, adopted at a time when students walked out of the back doors of schools and into the front doors of factories. These paradigms embody behaviourist learning theory, which understands learning as a straightforward process of response to stimuli, and Taylorism, the theory that all processes are made more efficient when broken down into small and simple segments that can then be easily taught and assessed (Lillard, 2005). These approaches to practitioner development also reflect what White (2007) identifies as a "technical rational paradigm... favoured by funders and policymakers" (p. 230) that is concerned, above all, with measurable and finite practice outcomes, rendering it not only narrow in scope but highly problematic in its assumption that the complexity of our work can be adequately reduced to distinct outputs. Historically, CYC educational programs have often been located within these technical rational paradigms (White, 2007), which manifest as an instrumental approach to practitioner development (Sellick et al., 2002; Usher, 1997). In the factory model of education, teaching is the constant, and individual students are provided with essentially identical learning experiences. As Freire (2000) and many others have argued, the factory model of education is designed to deliver a one-way transmission of knowledge from educator to student based on rote learning and memorization methods and the use of conventional learning assessments (e.g., multiple-choice exams, quizzes, academic papers). The successful student is the one who can correctly identify what is important and communicate it back to the instructor (Saher et al., 2022). While the factory model of education might never have been the most effective for bringing about deep learning, its value and efficacy are even more dubious in current culture (Rose, 2012; Horn & Evans 2013; Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). This is particularly pertinent in the context of child and youth care work, where complexity is ever-present, rendering necessary a foundation of dynamic, relational, ethical practice education.



# CHAPTER 13

# PASSING THE Torch

"AND SO WE LIFT OUR GAZES NOT TO WHAT STANDS BETWEEN US, BUT WHAT STANDS BEFORE US." AMANDA GORMAN Teaching undergraduate CYC students is a privilege that carries with it a deep sense of obligation and moral responsibility. We must overcome internal and external obstacles to truly know what learning is valuable and to be competent, impactful, and sensitive in transferring that knowledge. We must support each other in creating environments where we do inspire meaningful and authentic connections within students, among students, and between students and ourselves. Pope Francis described it this way, "Education is, above all, a relationship between teachers and students, and then of students among themselves: a community of people open to reality and others."

And so, with each intake of students, we are buoyed by the enthusiasm and excitement they generate and the transformational opportunities that lay ahead. First-year students are filled with hopeful anticipation and sometimes the butterflies of anxiety. We watch with careful attention as they cross the threshold into our classrooms for the very first time. They greet one another with nervous smiles as they scope out what will very likely become their preferred seat. They come with diverse backgrounds, varied life experiences, and different stages of developmental experience, yet we soon see them settle into community. There are signs of comfort as we are touched by their dishevelled bedhead, acts of kindness and tentative efforts to find belonging. As courses get fully underway, we learn more about each other and examine our reasons for being. We weather students' frustrations in not knowing and find joy when "ah ha" moments bring smiles. In navigating these choppy waters, we sense a coming together, a unique and pervasive energy that swells over the classroom. Collectively, we become something more, somehow better, brighter, and stronger than any single one of us. This coming together signals the precipice of a profound transformation, an intuitive point of transition that, if not recognized, can pass like a ship in the night. It whispers, "We trust that you believe in us. That you care for us and will accept us as we are, as students look to us to help make their learning journey meaningful and positive. The significance of our role as educators is amplified. We grow together, and the academic days and months fly by. Before we know it, once again, we are watching with careful attention. This time, as they cross the convocation stage, they are bright, selfassured, and wearing a fabulous array of "This is me now!" shoes that will take them in new directions. From the benches, we reflect on the individual and collective journey in CYC to this moment of confidence. We exhale with relief and glow with pride as we come full circle.

Relational art-based pedagogy is rich with creative ways to transform and elevate students' experiences in higher education. An education that nurtures the mind, body, and soul of a student is an education that unlocks the mystery and wonder of the heart and imagination and, in turn, deepens joy, wisdom, compassion, connection, and engagement with the world. This is evidenced in students' testimonials and visual expressions of meaningful emotional engagement, resonant connectedness, and holistic embodied learning. Our purposeful use of the term expressions rather than student outcomes, honours, in Eisner's words, "the roads to knowing that are many" (1985, p. 24). Eisner's efforts to communicate that intuitive, expressive, and felt nondiscursive and presentational forms of knowledge are no less significant pathways to meaning than those that rely on more traditional discursive forms. The word expressions also speak to our intent to respect the diversity of our students; we value their many forms of meaning-making as we move beyond predetermined outcomes toward experientially derived meanings, which lie along the rich and diverse continuum of individual learning. Finally, the term expressions accounts for students as they are in the relational space with differing intellectual, spiritual, physical, creative, and emotional potentialities. It epitomizes students who courageously claim a space of their own within the rational-minded post-secondary educational enterprise. Each struggling to be authentic, ready to throw "open windows to alternative realities" (Greene, 2001, p. 44) and to embark on "imaginative adventures in meaning" (p. 67) in accordance with their own choices and agency.

## RELATIONAL ART-BASED PEDAGOGY IS RICH WITH CREATIVE WAYS TO TRANSFORM AND ELEVATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Our dedication to a relationally informed arts-based approach to teaching and learning is deeply rooted in our commitment to create, work within, and capitalize on the value of its transformative possibilities. In a 1999 interview, author and social activist Alice Walker had this to say: "The way I see it, life is about growth, struggle, and trying to expand your love of self and of other people. Also, to really try hard not to cause harm—to cultivate a way of life that is harmless." When we reflect on how we have gone wrong with students, it generally comes down to one of two things. Either we failed to open ourselves to the essence of who they are, or we failed to teach the person beneath the defences. When we have interacted with students only as A, B or C averages, we must wonder if we have really given them what they need from us at all. Without acknowledging the holistic dimensions of our students and ourselves, we cannot be fully present and engaged educators. How discouraging that is and how much we all miss out on as human beings when it happens. We rely on all our teaching partners and are incredibly grateful for the excellence found in our CYC team, who keep us vigilant and inspired. In preparing this primer, we are reminded of the shared commitment within our team to support each other as we try new things, learn from our missteps, and try again to build on what we discover. We are convinced that the collective ideas of MacEwan CYC instructors and students in this primer offer a treasure map of sorts. One that can lead to classrooms and, by extension, academic institutions that are kinder, more inclusive, and more humane places to learn. Our experience with teaching and learning through relationally informed arts-based pedagogy has proven to be a very successful way to start.

In that spirit, we invite you to ask yourself if there is a way to give students more space to discover their inner artists and fully reveal themselves in your classroom. To consider how you might raise aesthetical learning to the level of academic rationale in your teaching practices so that science knowledge and theoretical concepts can also be learned through artistic expression and all students might believe that what they have to offer is important. To reflect on how song, dance, poetry, and the many other art forms might be incorporated to help your students honour alternative ways of knowing and meaningmaking, and in turn, share that artistry with their family, friends, communities, and those in their future care. We will continue to ask ourselves these questions along with you as these ideas foster collaborative learning and celebrate the relational nature of our beings. We are hopeful and encouraged as the next generation of open-minded CYC instructors joins our program. With them comes a wealth of untapped potential, exciting ideas, and future possibilities for collaboration. We keep passing the torch as we lean into what lies before us, fully believing that these artistic expressions are the building blocks of a life that is abundant and full. We hope that you join us on our journey to teach and live as much from the heart as from the head.



# About the Author: Gergrd Bellefuille

Over the past 23 years, it has been a privilege to share in the learning journey of my students. During this time, I've come to discover that the focus of post-secondary institutions on teaching the mind is asking our students to leave their spirits and human souls outside. By embracing the creative and intuitive process of relational arts-based teaching and learning methods, I have come to understand and greatly appreciate the importance of creating environments where meaningful we inspire and authentic connections within students. among and between students students. and ourselves; that the ultimate goal of education is to nourish the mind, body, and soul of students to help them embrace and unlock the mystery and wonder of their hearts, to engage them emotionally, and to stimulate their imagination, deepening the joy of learning and engagement with the world.







# About the Author: Kerry Hegney-Dalton

Teaching has always been my opportunity to connect with students through genuine relationship, bridging together our individual strengths and characteristics to create something meaningful. At its core, CYC is all about shared experiences and as we discover how to be with one another there is room for struggle, laughter, and growth. It can be hard to help students remain tethered to their purpose especially when they are tired or overwhelmed. It helps so much to be authentic and discover things that endear us to each other. Some days the fit seems effortless, and on others it is hard won. No matter the challenges of the day, my intention is always to develop the confidence, competence, and self-esteem of each student. Patience, kindness, and vigilance are needed to ensure students feel seen and successful. It is important to look out for each other and care for our collective. Art based teaching and learning methods support me by lending colour and richness to learning and life.



# About the Author: Rebeccg Stiller

In my experience, teaching is only helpful insofar as it is transformative; accumulating rote knowledge is irrelevant if the meaning we make of that knowledge doesn't shift the way we see the world. I have observed in my students what I continually observe in myself and fellow academics: we desire rigour and challenge. We desire opportunities to travel the boundaries of our understanding and to return changed. We also desire relationships: peers who build us up, more knowledgeable others who offer their support, and safety nets for the times we fall. My definition of helpful teaching incorporates a dynamic tension of rigour and relationship and establishes safe spaces to wrestle with complex concepts and, by doing so. reshape our perspectives. Approaching teaching and learning in this way requires developmental empathy, humility, care, and creativity, forming a reflection of excellent CYC practice. By establishing a strong foundation of relational connection, students become adequately safe to interrogate their existing logic and, therefore, construct new understanding in a transformative way.



174

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"This book is an invaluable addition to CYC pedagogy (a limited oeuvre) and the only one I know of focused on arts-based practices. The writing style is warm and inviting, creating a sense of colleagues sharing ideas and celebrating student work (something we don't do enough of, in my experience). By the end of the introduction, I was excited to read more and what I read rewarded my engagement."

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