

Relational Child & Youth Care *in action*



Editors

Heather Modlin, James Freeman, Christine Gaitens and Thom Garfat

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Foreword

It seems like only yesterday when I started my journey in childcare practice as a young man of 21, stepping foot into the milieu for the first time and discovering what would eventually become my life's work. I was taken under the wing of seasoned veterans who told me to look past behavior and find what the child was really saying. They helped me see that children were far more than what was written on paper, and my role was to connect with that young person and be a resource for them throughout their healing journey. Now, two decades into my career, I am still on a quest to improve my practice; still being taken under the wing of mentors; still trying to understand how we can help make the lives of young people better. Even today, as a CEO of a nonprofit organization, I am seeking ways to build into a system the very lessons I learned from the start of my career that shaped and influenced me.

It is interesting to look back on child and youth care and realize that we have always been performing relational practice without calling it that. When you distill it down, it's common sense. Yet, we struggle to see it every day. In our ever changing, busy world, we sometimes neglect to realize that it is the human connection – that network of caring and understanding – that is truly meaningful. As my friends, Thom Garfat and Leon Fulcher, would say to me many times, "It's the power of daily interaction that can transform lives." As a newbie, I would say, "It's the structure that transforms lives." Oh, how wrong I was! Now, I see relational practice in almost every interaction I have — not only with my own children, but also with the young people with whom we work, the amazing team of professionals I'm surrounded with at work, and the people I call my friends all over the world carrying out this incredible work. Relational practice is at the heart of everything we do. It is in our DNA, and it is the most powerful tool we have in our toolkit.

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice in Action is a collection of works from some of the finest thinkers — professors, practitioners, organizational leaders — across the globe. These are brilliant minds, who, through their writing, allow us a glimpse into their vast understanding and passion for helping others realize the power of relational practice and its

influence on our effectiveness as both practitioners and people. As I was reading this book, I found myself smiling because it is not every day that I pick up a book that speaks to the heart of who I am and always have been. At heart, I'm not a CEO; I'm a relational practitioner. In every way, this book spoke to my soul. It was also a helpful reminder to me to not lose sight of what our work is really about, which can be easy to do with reports, budgets and other important but mundane pieces that keep the wheels turning. But the power of relational practice is what creates lasting change. This important book is not filled with theories or written for academia. This is a book about how relational practice fits into everything we do – and it is about action.

The curators of this important work did a masterful job of allowing us to see many vantage points which serve to strengthen our understanding of relational practice. What they have created here is a work that every person who impacts the lives of others should read. There are chapters dedicated to every setting, whether it be academic, clinical, organizational, or interpersonal, and it encompasses a comprehensive review of what relational practice means to our world. There are valuable nuggets throughout each chapter that you will find helpful, no matter if you are a person working your first shift in a residential unit or an old, grizzled veteran like me.

I tip my hat to Heather Modlin, James Freeman, Christine Gaitens and Thom Garfat who have awakened my soul through this manuscript. I am proud to be their colleague and thankful for the reminder of what is truly important. We are all relational practitioners ...

Okpara Rice

CEO, Tanager Place

Cedar Rapids, Iowa, USA

Introduction

The book is entitled *Relational Child and Youth Care in Action*. Our intent is to showcase aspects of relational practice in a variety of settings and through multiple lenses. It is not an attempt to be comprehensive or a complete representation of relational practice. Rather, it is a forum to advance the ideas of people caring, connecting, being more present, inclusive, and loving in an imperfect world. Today, more than ever, child and youth care practitioners are needed to support young people and families as they navigate the challenges and complexities in their lives.

In child and youth care practice, it is the action we take that makes a difference. Sometimes that action is observable to others – like being involved in a planned activity at school or home. Sometimes it is internal – like the inner preparation and awareness required for us to be effective. Sometimes the action is the gentle showing up and being present with another. Whatever the form, child and youth care practitioners are heeding the call to action across settings and contexts.

We start in Chapter 1 with Bath, from Australia, describing the neuroscience of relational healing and highlighting the vital roles of felt safety and human connection in recovering from trauma. From Canada, Gaitens continues the theme in Chapter 2, focusing on the importance of love and caring in the educational milieu, and the systemic challenges associated with engaging children relationally in this setting. In Chapter 3, Munroe also writes about the school system in Canada, examining the experiences of Black youth in schools through the lenses of critical race theory, anti-black racism, racial trauma, power and oppression. Child and youth care practitioners are challenged to “interrupt the patterns and privileges of whiteness” that pervade the education system.

In Chapter 4 Briegel and Kranjcevic share their family’s journey through the child and adolescent health system in Canada, providing examples of what worked and what didn’t work from a relational perspective. The Canadian hospital setting also features in Chapter 5, where Halliday describes relational practice from a practitioner perspective, with a focus on brief interactions in inpatient care, intake assessment and crisis intervention.

From South Africa, in Chapter 6, Phirie and Lodge discuss South African relational child and youth care practice, the impact of colonization on South African child rearing practices and connection to traditional Zulu practices and beliefs. Also from South Africa, Thumbadoo, in Chapter 7, describes a highly successful community-based program, the Isibindi Model, in which child and youth care workers demonstrate the characteristics of relational practice, in particular the spirit of love, through simple acts of caring.

In Chapter 8, Rhodes describes a community youth development model in the United States run, in part, by program graduates, and highlights the ways in which the characteristics of relational child and youth care practice permeate the program.

From Canada, Holloway, in Chapter 9, explores the inter-woven layers of relational practice and the factors that contribute to an “unconditional relational response.” According to Holloway, building a strong relational foundation requires intentionality, mastery and effort on the part of the practitioner. Building on the importance of intentionality and mastery, in Chapter 10 Baker and McMahon (United States) present a neuro-transactional approach to relational practice, describe the ways in which our experiences influence our development, and provide examples of “reimbursements” that child and youth care practitioners can provide to young people to support their development.

Another Canadian, Vachon, in Chapter 11 introduces the concept of aesthetics to relational child and youth care practice and explores the implications of viewing our work through the lens of beauty. In Chapter 12, Smith, from Scotland, looks at the need to locate relationships within a broader context than just the interpersonal. He encourages us to consider relational practice through a social theory lens, with specific focus on recognition, redistribution, and relational equality. Robinson (Canada), in Chapter 13, invites us to consider the role of companion animals in relational practice.

Chapter 14 brings us humour, as an essential element of relational practice, explored by Digney from Ireland. In Chapter 15, Smart (Scotland) takes a creative slant on relational practice, using Aesop’s Fables to explore the themes of curiosity, patience, and kindness. Hadley and Garfat (Canada) use storytelling, in Chapter 16, as a topic and a process to illustrate the Being, Interpreting and Doing aspects of relational practice.

Mealtime is the focus for Freeman (United States), in Chapter 17, as a powerful example of an activity embedded in the everyday that can be utilized to create experiences of caring, mattering and belonging.

In Chapter 18, Gulamhusein, Reed & McGrath speak to their experiences as educators engaging intentionally in relational practice within the university classroom in Canada. Van der Westhuizen, in Chapter 19, also reflects on his own experiences, in this case working relationally with children and youth as a therapist in South Africa and compares child and youth care and social work relational approaches. In Chapter 20, Modlin and Phelan (Canada) review relational practice across disciplines, identifying similarities and differences and proposing a model that is unique to relational child and youth care practice.

In Chapter 21, Fulcher (New Zealand) examines the important topic of workplace fatigue, the organizational factors that contribute to fatigue, and ways in which child and youth care practitioners and relational practices can be impacted by fatigue. From the United States Meikoetter, in Chapter 22 also recognizes the impact of the work on practitioners and discusses the importance of attachment and relational healing as a focus of organizational leadership.

We are publishing this book against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and months of protests and public discourse regarding the experiences of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. The chaos of our present day represents the culmination of hundreds of years of oppression, discrimination, pain, and inequity. Relational engagement matters. Acts of caring matter. Context matters. The world in which we are living has influenced our writing and editing choices and contributed to what we believe is a better book as a result.

About the Editors

HEATHER MODLIN, PhD has worked in the child and youth care field for over 30 years. She is currently Provincial Director of Key Assets Newfoundland and Labrador. Heather is Chairperson of the CYC-Net Board of Governors, an editorial board member of Relational Child and Youth Care Practice, and a Steering Committee member for the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance. Heather has an MSc in Child and Youth Care Administration from Nova Southeastern University and a PhD in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria, where she is also a sessional instructor. In 2017 Heather received the YWCA Woman of Distinction Award for Community and Social Development in Newfoundland and Labrador, in 2018 she was the Atlantic Canada nominee for the RBC Women of Influence Social Change Award, and in 2019 she was one of five short-listed nominees for the Lynn Factor Stand Up for Kids Award.

JAMES FREEMAN, MA, CYC-P is a career Child and Youth Care practitioner with over 25 years of direct practice and leadership experience in education, out-of-school time programs, residential care, and family camp settings. He has served as president of the Child and Youth Care Certification Board, board member for the Association of Children's Residential Centers and the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice, and editor of CYC-Online, the monthly journal of the International Child and Youth Care Network (CYC-Net). Learn more about his work at www.training-grounds.net

CHRISTINE GAITENS, MSc, CYC-P is the Manager of Child and Youth Services at the Toronto District School Board in Ontario, Canada, where she is responsible to implement professional practice standards and provide leadership, professional development and supervision for 500 child and youth care practitioners. She has been a Child and Youth Care Practitioner for 30 years and has supported families, children and youth through her work in residential care, family preservation services, foster care, child care and the education sector. Christine has also been an active member of the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care, volunteering on the Board of

Directors in 2012 and serving as President from 2013 to 2017. Christine is a passionate supporter of legislated practice for CYCPs and continues to promote the profession and support the development of professional Child and Youth Care Practitioners.

THOM GARFAT, PhD has worked with young people, families and those who work with them for 50 years. He holds a MA in Clinical Psychology and his PhD is in Child and Youth Care. Thom is the Co-founder and Editor of the *International Child & Youth Care Network* (www.cyc-net.org) and the Canadian journal *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*. Thom is also the developer of the training, *The Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events* which is used worldwide. Through his company, TransformAction, Thom offers consultation, training and keynote addresses around the world. He is the author or co-author of 7 books and numerous professional articles. His primary focus is on 'making it work'; finding practical everyday ways to enhance the process of healing and development for young people and families. He lives in Quebec, with Sylviane. More about Thom can be found at www.transformaction.com

Relational Child & Youth Care *in action*

A must read. This book 'resets' insights into meaningful relational Child and Youth Care practice – and the related complexities of the profession. This compilation of relational Child and Youth Care wisdom, from within the field, not only draws together all that is core to Child and Youth Care, but also critically evaluates the application to and impact on every aspect of professional practice and focused outcomes for young people, families and the professional practitioners who journey with them through trauma, change and healing.

LEE LOYNES

Chief Executive Officer, Girls and Boys Town South Africa and Board Member of the CYC-Net Board of Governors

When reading this book it is clear to see how diverse and adaptable the practice of Child and Youth Care is. How the foundation of what we do can be applied anywhere. Child and Youth Care is its own specific language – we learn to feel it and help interpret it to those we engage with.

ZIIGWANBINESII CHARLES

Cultural Advisor, Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services and Board Member of the CYC-Net Board of Governors

This book reviews a vast range of topics related to Relational Child and Youth Care Practices, from aesthetics to attachment theories; from educational perspectives to therapeutic approaches; from theoretical models to experiential knowledge; from the creativity of storytelling to the impact of acts of caring; from the use of animal in relational practices to workplace fatigue and relational healing. It is a comprehensive must-read for anyone involved in child and youth care work, across continents from multiple perspectives.

KIRAN MODI, PhD

Founder Managing Trustee, Udayan Care, India and Board Member of the CYC-Net Board of Governors



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