

**Emergent identity  
in child and youth care practice and education**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the issue of self-concept shift in child and youth care practitioners in the educational milieu. It is an autobiographical rendering of my own development and education as CYC practitioner and educator, which begins with my curiosity about CYC education in Canada and the point at which CYC candidates discover a sense of themselves as CYC practitioners. The initial stages of my inquiry included a journey across Canada to be with CYC graduates and co-investigate what contributes to their shift in self-concept from student to novice practitioner in their post-secondary education and how that influenced my CYC educator self-concept. The events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and other family health issues prolonged the investigation and triggered a reframing of the inquiry into self-concept shifting. Thus, the work evolved from initially being conceived as an ethnography of CYC education in Canada to more of a self-study of teacher education. The thesis puts forward this reframed conceptualization of CYC practitioner identity from a “shift” to a generative, *emergent*, and *ever developing perspective on learning and growing*.

**Keywords:** self-study; child and youth care; identity; social work

## **Dedication**

This work could not have been realized without the humans that were in relationship with me over the journey. To my partner for her strength and support while she faced difficult and life changing challenges. To my family that allowed me to say no to them and yes to time in my office as I wrote and edited the manuscript. All the humans that participated in my journey across Canada that shared with me their wisdom and experience. I finally wish to thank my teaching colleagues and the learners of the University of the Fraser Valley that adjusted and supported me as I navigated my life and learning journey

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## Glossary

CYC family

I use this term because my experience of meeting and being with CYC practitioners is like being with a family member; familiar, comfortable, and accepting.

Folks

I use this term rather than label people as students. I do this specifically in Chapter 2 for the following reasons: 1) they were colleagues in the research experience given that we used co-operative inquiry as our method; 2) they taught me about travelling through their education; 3) I find it hard to live with words like student and teacher as it often re-presents people in ways that speak to power, control and authority. I feel the same about the words client and counsellor/therapist, instead I tend to use the descriptors of “humans I serve.”

Spiritual

I use this word to describe the experience I have when I am with other humans and the relationship includes a sensory awareness that I cannot explain any other way. I provide an example of what I mean here. Perhaps you have entered a room where others are and you sense there is tension between people, but you are not sure of what that tension is about, it may be true or not, but you feel something.

## Preface



A younger me, perhaps wondering what I will become...

Just who do we think we are?

Just who do we think we are?

Just who do we think we are?

Just who do we think we are?

(Mitchell & Weber, 2005 p.1)

## Personal Land Acknowledgement

I currently reside on, and work in, the territories of the Stó: lo peoples. Specifically, I reside on the lands of the Matsqui, peoples who speak Halqemeylem.

I spend time on the land, often travelling into many territories in the province of British Columbia. I spend time on the land because it is my place of spiritual connection, recreation, and positive life force. I travel to the prairies, forests, rivers, and lakes to be with nature, the lands cared for by the Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

I am a gardener, and, in my garden, I grow food, flowers, and trees. I have been told that the place where I grow carrots and onions was once a natural harvest area for the Matsqui peoples for wild onions and carrots. I provide food for the birds and love to watch them. All the activities I do at my home give me great joy. As I invite truth and reconciliation into my life, one powerful aspect of this process has been an awareness that the land beneath my feet that I call “mine,” is in fact not mine. The “truth” is that this land was taken from the Stó: lo peoples and then sold to me. As I sit with this, I am needing to find a place in my heart where I can “reconcile” this story of land transfer and ownership as it relates to a history that I do not wish to be a part of. This land acknowledgement is meant to expose the multiple narratives that are present if we heed the request to reconcile the many stories of Turtle Island (Canadian) history and our place on the land and in the history of this place.

## Preamble

### Privilege

As the writer of this document, I wish to unpack some of the elements of my privilege for the reader to create a context for this work. I am an English only speaking white male in his 50s. I currently live in the upper middle class social economic bracket. I am an immigrant settler born in Crawley England in 1967. I have lived in the lower mainland for most of the time since arriving here in 1986. I have been married and divorced and we created two wonderful girls. I have a partner of 20 years who also created a wonderful daughter. So, we are a blended family with three girls 24, 25, and 26 who are now living out of our family home. All my daughters are living happy and healthy as adults, a wonderful gift. I have worked in the field of Child and Youth Care for close to 30 years and continue to run a business, now in its 18th year, where I provide mental health services under contract for the Ministry of Child and Family Development/ Child and Youth mental health division. I have been teaching at the University of the Fraser Valley for close to 10 years, seven as a sessional contractor and three as a full-time faculty member. I recognize that I have many privileges in our society and continue to unpack and explore these privileges so that I can leverage them to support those in my community whose voice and presents may be disregarded or abused.

As this work specifically speaks to my personal and unique experience it is more appropriate to think of it as a conceptual work, rather than empirical. This thesis puts forward a white, male, cis-gendered, and able-bodied lived experience. It cannot represent experiences of humanity that I do not hold. As you read this work, I expect that, depending on your positionality, you may find times when I speak to starkly different experiences than yours, based in my whiteness and privilege. I am hopeful that the outcome of this experience will be an opportunity for the expression and recognition of that difference and uniqueness, rather than a *subjugation* of difference and uniqueness. I wrote this work to represent my pathway as I explore my emergent identity utilizing autobiographical self-study. I am hopeful that the pathway generated becomes one that allows me to further articulate my self-understanding and helps others see new possibilities for CYC identity and development in practice and education. My hope is this thesis invites others to examine their unique *identity-story* of CYC emergence. With

this, the collection of stories can illuminate an inclusive and diverse collection stories of self-concept emergence for CYC educators.

## **How I wrote this work**

Firstly, this work is not read through the lens of orthodox academic standards and criteria, it is an autobiographical self-study, an intimate narrative, that offers the reader my deeply personal experience of examining my emerging CYC educator self-concept. The data streams weaved in this work emanate from conversations with child and youth care graduates, my lived experiences, and my reflections on pedagogical engagements. Secondly, the writing genre employed in the work is storytelling, as I invite readers into an intimate place that lies between experiential, axiological, empirical, and imagined worlds of my life-space. As you read this work you may find it helpful to consider looking for signposts rather than orthodox thesis components. The purpose of this work is to offer fresh perspectives and renderings of child and youth care identity, its nature and emergence throughout the education and development of the practitioner.

Finally, as you read this work you will experience times when I write in a manner that seems to be hesitant, tentative, or passive. I do this as it shows that I believe or think about the idea or concept with intention but also hold it gently because I feel it can change quickly and/or might be bound up in my personal privilege. There are specific words I use that I need to contextualize as they may mean something different to me than they might mean to you, see previous glossary.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

In this Chapter, I will share how my internal rub or cognitive dissonance moved through a dialogue with self, to relational dialogue with others, eventually focusing into the purpose that underpins this inquiry. Truthfully, I am wondering “who am I (becoming)” as I transform from a frontline Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioner, who provided direct service to children and their family in the community milieu, to an educator in a CYC degree program at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), a public post-secondary institutional milieu.

## 1.1. My CYC Relational Pedagogy - What am I examining?

This thesis re/presents my journey of discovery built from experiences with people, pedagogical processes and several significant life events that have influenced me over the past five years. The people that have shared my journey are graduates of several CYC programs across Canada, UFV CYC students and graduates, colleagues, and mentors. The processes connected to moving from a sessional instructor to a full-time faculty. Finally, I wish to acknowledge three circumstances in my world that have occurred over the past two years: 1) one we are all familiar with, COVID-19 and the relational shifts connected to life and learning; 2) my partner’s diagnosis of cancer and the treatment journey we travelled while also navigating my partner’s anxiety; 3) the recent passing of my dad who also was a good friend.

I believe that I am nurtured and challenged physically, mentally, and spiritually by, and in, all the relationships I experience. The relationships I speak of are not solely human; they include nature, generational family stories, my place on the land as a settler and immigrant, and recently the addition of Tonka, my new canine care partner. I hold a relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) and ontology (Thayer-Bacon, 2017) where “learning” for me happens in shared experiences. The discipline of CYC is anchored in relationships (Garfat et.al, , 2018; Stuart, 2013), therefore so must be my pedagogical practice. So, as I went about deciding on how to explore my practice, I felt I needed to explore it within relationships. I am intending in this work to theorize my practice through writing my self into presence. To examine, explore, and define what my teaching pedagogy is, I did a self-study (Samaras, 2011; Bullough & Pinner, 2001.). I have

chosen to navigate this process by weaving Praxis self-reflection (Schön, 1987; White, 2007) and autobiographical self-study (Bullough & Pinner, 2001) together through the body of the work, the relational data.

What I intend to address in this work is my process of unearthing my current values, beliefs, ethics, and processes of my CYC pedagogy and how they relate to my thoughts, feelings, and actions as a CYC educator. In this unearthing process what I mean to explore are the ways in which I am nurtured and sculpted by these elements rather than a documentation and categorizing of them. What I have welcomed into my emerging CYC educator identity is that my pedagogical self is relationally rooted and woven together in the spaces where teaching and learning occur. I have come to understand that as I look out on the landscape of individual bodies that inhabit the classroom that there are so many more elements that undergird theirs, no, our presence in the room, or as we prefer to call it in CYC practice “the milieu” (Stuart, 2013. p. 87). There are the connections that they have with themselves, joys, triumphs, trauma, fears, and resilience. There are the elements of our shared milieu: sensory emotional, physical, cultural, social, and ideological (Stuart, 2013, p 87.), and then there are the developmental ecological considerations (Stuart, 2013, p 240.) that also influence our shared experience. To share a few, there are the influences of gender, culture, privilege, reconciliation, and our individual and shared connection to these elements. I also enjoy the shared pedagogical experience of teaching a cohort model with my colleagues at the UFV. Our team operates in a culture of accountability, support, care, and thriving that transcends our individual experience to form our team with a community of care approach to our pedagogical tasks. Additionally, we are lucky that our team works in an ideology of reconciliation, shared commitment, and visioning for the future, as seen in our institutional mission statement: *Engaging learners, transforming lives, building community. yoystexw ye totilthet, ayeqet kw'e shxwaylexws, thayt kw'e st'elt'elawtexw.*

This mission statement is supported by a dean who supports our approach to the curriculum and student support, allowing us to venture into our vulnerabilities and so as we can be courageous, creative, and risk takers as we develop and respond to an ever-changing world, micro to macro. Finally, our UFV student support team is amazing as they work with us so that we can ask students to dig deep into their “self” through their assignments knowing that we can share the load appropriately if they meet their struggles, hurts, and vulnerability perhaps needing counselling support to turn this into



their courage and resilience (Brown, 2018). As I often share with students in the Introduction to Child and Youth Care course, “our program, your study, is not simply about gaining knowledge; it will be transformational, you will not be the same person at convocation that you are at invocation.” I suggest that their choice to start a degree program and explore the relational world will bring them into contact with new learning and a new relationship with self and other. I speak about the journey further and help them understand that in our CYC program, we invite them to dig deep into their beliefs, values, and ethics in order to identify and sculpt their emerging self, which includes being a professional in a community of practice where their purpose is to support children, youth and family, and to build community. I see our students involved in a “rite of passage” (Grimes, 2000; van Gennep et al., 2013) and the time frame is our shared liminal space in the degree.

Over the years, I have been taught by students about my responsibility to promote a culture of connection, care, and compassion for personal and group safety, safety that allows our minds, spirit, and heart to be open to each other as we explore the curriculum together (Palmer, 2007). I now experience the classroom in multiple dimensions: literal, spiritual, emotional, and relational ways of knowing, doing and being (White, 2007). This study has deepened this awareness in many ways, which I will cover in much greater detail over the ensuing chapters.

I now shift to what may seem a very different, but I believe parallel subject to present and use as a resemblance regarding what I have come to understand about the importance of the classroom milieu for individual student success. I wish to compare the complexity of the classroom milieu alongside the complexity of forest ecology. The success of an individual tree is not a singular triumph. In a forest, trees connect, communicate, and support one another in order to provide the needs of life, a process that could be seen as nurturing one another (Simard, 2021; Wohlleben, 2016). This process is not obvious when we walk along a forest path, what is visually obvious are the trees themselves, we tend to assume that trees are independent of one another, competing for resources. However, if we were to know forest ecology and the interconnected life of the forest it would be different. If I looked deeply into how the trees, plants, geography, and weather interact how might that shift our walk in the forest and our assumptions, beliefs, and values about forest ecology? How might we see the forest and the tree? What is now evident about forests and trees is that trees are

interconnected, in fact they nurture one another in the forest milieu (Wohlleben, 2018 p16-17) . In very real ways, trees are influencing each other and enabling each other's growth and development. They do this through the connection they have to each other via sub-surface mycelium, "A tree's most important means of staying connected to other trees is a "wood wide web" of soil fungi that connects vegetation in an intimate network that allows the sharing of an enormous amount of information and goods (Wohlleben, 2016, p. 11.). Wohlleben (2016) and Simard (2021) were curious about what contributes to an individual trees' success. Both Simard (2021) and Wohlleben (2016) studied what surrounds trees rather than the tree alone and what they found was that success for the individual tree hinges on the relationship between trees and the spaces they inhabit, the often-unseen elements. They noticed that trees are relational beings and that subtle changes in their relationships can impact the overall wellbeing of the community of trees. I have come to believe that this is also true for the individual CYC student in the classroom, the cohort, our education team, our institution and by extension the field of CYC all impact the individual success of each student. I recognize that a well designed curriculum with clear learning outcomes is important; however, what seems to me to underpin the outcome of the learning opportunities for each student is the holistic elements of the classroom, our department and the institution and our ability to communicate and share resources, the wellbeing of the one is undergirded by the wellbeing of the community that the individual inhabits. I connect the concept of forest ecology to my CYC pedagogy and the writing of Parker Palmer (2007) who stated, "Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves (Loc 563-565).

In CYC practice we consider the management of the therapeutic milieu the responsibility of the CYC practitioner. We expect practitioners to understand and adapt the milieu so that the quality of the caring relationship between the CYC practitioner and the child, youth and family is safe, nurturing, and a place of risk taking. Unless the practitioner is intentional in navigating the milieu towards safety and transformational learning the opportunity for therapeutic change is reduced or impossible. I would postulate, based on what I have learnt in this study and through my life journey, that the CYC post-secondary classroom is a therapeutic milieu designed for the process of knowledge transfer and expected transformational change. Briefly let us return to the

forest comparison to help me explain my hypothesis about the importance of interconnectedness. Wholleben (2016) describes the “therapeutic milieu” of the forest in his book *The Hidden Life of Trees*:

When trees grow together, nutrients and water can be optimally divided among them all so that each tree can grow into the best tree it can be. If you “help” individual trees by getting rid of their supposed competition, the remaining trees are bereft. They send messages out to their neighbors in vain, because nothing remains but stumps. Every tree now muddles along on its own, giving rise to great differences in productivity. Some individuals photosynthesize like mad until sugar positively bubbles along their trunk. As a result, they are fit and grow better, but they aren’t particularly long-lived. This is because a tree can be only as strong as the forest that surrounds it. And there are now a lot of losers in the forest. Weaker members, who would once have been supported by the stronger ones, suddenly fall behind. Whether the reason for their decline is their location and lack of nutrients, a passing malaise, or genetic makeup, they now fall prey to insects and fungi. (pp. 16-17)

My study has changed me and the way I am practicing my CYC family practice and pedagogy, in ways I imagine Wohllenben’s study (2016) into forest ecology changed the way he experiences the forest and trees. My task as a CYC educator is to develop strong resilient curriculum that lives in healthy classroom conditions, experiences, and relationships, to foster a safe educative therapeutic milieu. Building a relationally healthy and emotional safe milieu is my main task for I believe that only then can students connect to the curriculum collectively to nurture and challenge each other to support transformational learning (Kitchenham, 2008) that supports them into developing their best self. What follows in this work is my presentation of relational learnings over the past years that have helped me work towards becoming a better CYC educator, one who seeks to build healthy, supportive learning events in the teaching and learning milieu.

## **1.2. The learning Journey**

### **1.2.1. How I got to here**

At the beginning of this work, I was not likely contemplating “who do I think I am” in the way I do today; rather, I was likely thinking how do I get off this darn wall so I can run around on the beach, splash in the ocean, then get some fish and chips wrapped in newspaper. As a child, I was often off in the natural world, at the local adventure

playground, building forts in the forest, building rafts to float on the local lakes and streams to follow my curiosity, what we now call experiential and land-based learning. On the land, I would travel, often with friends but not always, all-day I would be finding experiences and problems to solve. I guess then as now, I was seeking meaning making in adventure. I often miss the freedom of the emergent curriculum and nature-based pedagogy of my childhood. In many ways this was the early foundation of my relational based epistemology, ontology, and axiology. I chose the picture at the start of this manuscript because there is also something else about that image, it is the look I have, a slight discomfort, about... something, and I often have that same feeling today.

I have some undiagnosed learning challenges, likely ADHD and dysgraphia. I can self-identify these with some confidence as I have been working with youth and family in the mental health field for approximately 20 years out of my over 30 years of practice. Additionally, I am effective at experiencing another's emotional state, to have empathy; however, when you have that skill as a young person you do not necessarily understand what is occurring and you feel... different. I am being transparent about myself because it is one of the reasons for conducting this study. Frankly, sometimes I feel like I belong and other times I feel like I am trying to belong. My thesis supervisor captured this so well after a meeting we had to discuss this work

There has been some discussion throughout our work together about "making a journey" or "crossing the line"...so there is a notion of travelling. Moving across the Canadian provinces... moving from outsider to insider in terms of conceptions of self as child care worker... even moving from sessional to continuing faculty, and associated feelings of membership (Allan Mackinnon personal communication).

Perhaps many people feel the same as I do, perhaps it is the imposter syndrome, or perhaps it is unique to me. These feelings of struggle to belong and identity formation also contributed to my decision to do part of the study by travelling across the land. I got in my 2007 Jeep liberty and took 10 weeks to cross the country, meeting people and chatting about Canada, community, and CYC practice. I chose to camp, to be on and in the landscape as my preferred way to settle after travel. It seemed impossible to complete this study any other way. I felt compelled to travel to meet CYC practitioners in their own spaces, another CYC practice called life space intervention (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013, p 4.), so I could relationally move from outsider to insider with local CYC practitioners. To be in relational conversation so I could know it, so I could share it, so I

could feel it, the experience of the recent graduates as we chatted about their move from seeing themselves as CYC outsiders -students- to becoming CYC insiders - practitioners- to basically be with them as they considered “who they think they are” becoming.

When I consider why it was important for me to travel from place to place, to meet people where they live, and experience new things to move from not belonging to belonging, I think I learnt it when I was young. As a child I was encouraged to journey, to explore, to negotiate myself, my friendships, and the world around me to embrace risk and see it as growth. I grew up in England a child of parents who had grown up with the horrors of the second world war; Mom and Dad were born in 1933. They experienced a world war where, intentionally, children, families and communities were targeted for eradication, a significant change in warfare at the time. In this new form of war whole communities were displaced and demolished. My parents experienced being shipped away from their home often living with strangers due to their home town, London, being bombed; I would guess, that this cultural trauma of belonging and not belonging, moving across the country, likely has a shadow impact on me as well if we consider the multi-generational trauma possibilities.

I decided to travel across Canada meeting with recent CYC graduates and education colleagues because I wanted to know CYC practice and education in new locations from new perspectives. I utilized a co-operative inquiry method to capture this information, details about the method are covered in chapter 2. During this journey not only did I get to experience CYC practice and pedagogy differently, but I also began to understand Canada and its citizens better. As a landed immigrant I knew Canada by knowing BC, Alberta, and a little of Saskatchewan. Sure, I watched the news and Rick Mercer, but I had not been on the land of other provinces engaging in relationship with others in their space and time.

One of my greatest strengths as a CYC is my capacity to be a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983; White, 2007). In my previous graduate work, I used the critical incident technique (Butterfield et al., 2005) to explore what helps and what hinders youth participation in care teams, and the findings of that research anchored my practice thereafter. So, as I embarked on this study, I wanted to know what “being an effective educator” of CYC’s looks like so that once again I can have this knowledge anchor my

next phase of practice. Additionally, I wanted my study to be underpinned by core elements of CYC practice: 1) reflective 2) relational 3) strength based 4) pluralistic, and 5) social justice. Furthermore, the study needed to view the inquiry through a developmental ecological lens. Finally, much of the literature in the field is focused on service delivery, so our literature has a gap when it comes to pedagogical practice. In the CYC field we have an assertion that “we are the tool”(Garfat & Fulcher, 2018. p. 30) and as such practitioners are required to practice intentional, ethical reflective practice. For my personal self-reflection on the learning from the CYC graduate co-operative inquiry I intended to use an arts-based ethnography. This method utilizes times of reflection that are rendered into an E-postcard which are sent to critical friends who offer their response to the rendering, I detail this method in chapter 2. These initial methods required some adjustment due to some challenges that occurred during the cross-Canada research journey and personal life challenges. It was decided that utilization of autobiographical self study would enable me to weave together the data from the cross Canada trip and the life experience that occurred over the next few years post trip. In sharing my conversations, learnings, and thoughts about my own teaching practice and placing this in the public realm, I am now moving self-reflection into self-study, which may contribute to our discipline’s discussion on teaching in post-secondary as described by Loughran and Northfield (1998) “self-study might be viewed, understood and practiced so that the outcomes may be communicated to others and thereby lead to learning that is useful and applicable for more than just the individuals directly involved (p. 13). In the next section I will explain why I eventually utilized an autobiographical self-study method to weave all the pieces together, the original methods of arts based autoethnography and co-operative inquiry are covered in detail in chapter two.

### **1.2.2. Methodological stance**

This study originally utilized two methods of inquiry that will be discussed in detail in chapter two co-operative inquiry and an art based autoethnography. However, due to COVID-19 and some significant personal issues the study extended beyond its initial timeframe and focus and as such required a shift in methodological stance to account and include the reflective learnings experienced. Therefore, it was decided that to include all the sources of information into this study the binding method became autobiographical self-study.

In August 1996, the first conference for teacher educators with a pure focus of exploring the scholarship of one's practice –self- study- occurred in Sussex, England (Hamilton et al., 1998, p.viii). Since then, self-study continues to gain ground in the field of education (Sivia, 2017, p 8.), anthropology, linguistics, and economics (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.13). The participants at that first conference were all “involved in some way in the professional preparation of teachers...’caring’ seemed to be an underlying concern for them” (Hamilton et al., 1998, p ix.). Self-study appears to come from those in a field that care for the human story that is the context for the practice of teaching, this also is why self-study likely appealed to me. Additionally, the method of self-study emerges from the work of Schön (1983) with his focus on reflection-in action and reflection on action (Hamilton et al., 1998, p 9.; Stuart. 2013, p 58) As mentioned earlier in this document this is also the ground from which CYC praxis emerged (White, 2007) and that I utilized throughout this work. In completing this study one of my intentions was to learn from and with others about CYC teaching and learning so that I can become better at supporting student learning and the process of self-concept shift. The self-study method is said to enable teacher educators to study experience so as to create change in “the field” by grounding it in change in the “people” of the field (Hamilton et al., 1998, p 9.)

In this thesis, I chose self-study as the binding method to weave together the experience gained from the co-operative study, the personal journey across Canada and the evolution of the study to involve life experiences that extended and deepened this work. Additionally, as noted by Loughran and Northfield (1998) in Hamilton et al. “self-study is a personal process of thinking, refining, reframing, and developing actions”( p 15.) Finally, I came to this method of inquiry because the method arose from the desire in teacher educators to “ensure that their teaching practice is congruent with the expectations they have of their student-teachers developing practice”(Hamilton et al., 1998, p 23). This aligns with my thesis interest in whether it is important for students to experience CYC approaches from their CYC educators concurrent to learning CYC theory.

Ultimately the experience of this learning journey led me to resolve the challenges I faced initially to adapt the method and chose self-study-autobiography as the binding methodological stance because it appeared to me to be the best method to draw all the pieces together. The autobiographical method of self-study emerged from

the “Fifth Moment” in educational research where research, questions of context, process, and relationship have moved toward the center of inquiry”(Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.13). Recognizing that the “complexity of our time” (White, 2015) is bound in the practice and our questions of practice is a key element of why autobiographical self-study is the method chosen.

### ***Trustworthiness and honesty of the autobiographic method***

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) have identified several criteria to assure that self-study is trustworthy and honest. They identify that self-study is “when biography and history are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of a time, then self-study moves to research. They further suggest that

The balance can be struck at many times during the self-study process, but when a study is reported, the balance must be in evidence not only in what data have been gathered (from self and other) and presented, but in how they have been analyzed, in how they have been brought together in conversation(Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.15)

To assure that autobiographical self-study is valuable to the field Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) identify the following guidelines:

1) should ring true and enable connection; 2) promote insight and interpretation; 3) engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stance; 4) are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator; 5) have authentic voice 6) ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other; 7) portray character development and include dramatic action: something genuine is at stake in the story;8) attend carefully to persons in context or setting; 9) offer fresh perspectives on established truths (p 16-19).

I believe that the self-study in teacher education practices is not only a good fit for my study in terms of providing a methodological stance and perspective on learning in and from practice – in my case CYC practice and post-secondary teaching – but also in terms of providing a discourse within the educational community that helps to situate the findings and conclusions from my study.



### **1.2.3. Hopes? Dreams? Outcomes?**

I have been a student in the education milieu for close to 19 years. In that time, I have come across pedagogical experiences that enabled me to connect to and tackle learning outcomes; whereas there have been other experiences where I struggled. I hold the position that it is not the sole responsibility of the educator to enable students to connect to the curriculum and accomplish learning outcomes; however, it often starts with the ability of the educator to build the pedagogical milieu where the student, educator, and curriculum connect. The experiences that worked for me as a student had something to do with me and my interest in the material, and sometimes it was due to students in the room but I would say that often it was the way the educator created the experience of learning that made a significant difference, mostly because it often contained the effective integration of learning outcomes, the social emotional climate, the politics of relationships and the meaning of the learning, or to put it another way perhaps it allows a learner to feel safe, to be vulnerable, and therefore learn. For me what seemed to contribute to the educator's capacity to build safety was directly related to the quality and equity of the relationship between curriculum, students, and other educators. This perception is also why I felt a need to travel across the country and talk with recently graduated students to see what they noted about learning that enabled them to shift their self-concept from "I am just a student" to "I am a CYC practitioner."

During the last nine years of my practice where I have been sessional teaching in the Child, Youth and Family Studies Department (CYFS) at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), where I gained my undergraduate degree. As of August 2019, I am a full-time faculty at UFV in CYFS department. Over the years of part-time teaching, I started to wonder how teaching in post-secondary may simply be another milieu of CYC practice. Then in year four, I experienced a teaching crisis. In a few courses some students provided troubling feedback on my teaching assessments. They had experienced me as demanding, unpredictable, confusing, and unsafe, and this deeply troubled me. The hardest aspect for me to hear was that somehow, I was not providing a safe learning environment and that students felt like I had lots of great information to offer but they could not access it as they were afraid to engage in dialogue in the room for fear of being judged and disrespected. I wondered how I had got to a place in my practice that was so far away from what had, until that point, been one of my greatest strengths, creating safe spaces for self-discovery, personal change, and lifelong

learning. I considered leaving teaching because I was so upset with myself for somehow getting to this spot and being so disconnected from my intention to create open, safe learning environments. If I stayed, then this required me doing some deep personal work and reflect on what had happened and how I could adjust things in the future. To resolve this crisis, I did Praxis self-reflection and connected to my mentor Christine Slavik in the department. As a result, I adapted my teaching practice. I also started EdD in practice at Simon Fraser University. In White's 2007 article she describes CYC Praxis as the "Knowing, Doing, & Being of the work." Since this article, she evolved the concept of Praxis in a manner that considers a social political context (White, 2015). White (2007) suggests that we use Praxis so that we can have an "ethical, self-aware, responsive, and accountable action (p.226)" to the way in which we engage in an embodied relational approach to CYC practice that considers the complexity of our times. This call to action also is part of the rationale for conducting the work in this thesis.

### **1.3. Student experience as contributor to study direction**

This study emerged from two main points in time in my CYC practice development. First, when I graduated from my CYC degree at the UFV, where I currently teach. During the final years of the study, I experienced a shift in my self-concept from, "I am just a student" to "I am a CYC practitioner." Then, in 2015 after several years of sessional teaching, I began to notice a similar self-concept shift in many of the students in the program, generally around the same time that I experienced my self-concept shift. Noticing the experience of students and myself led me to my initial research question: What contributes in a CYC post-secondary program to a CYC students' ability to shift their self-concept from "I am just a student" to "I am a CYC practitioner" and in what way might this impact my CYC Praxis as an educator in a post-secondary milieu. Then, as I went further, it shifted to how we influence each other and how that impacts my CYC pedagogy. Then finally, how does my life journey, the teaching and learning processes I have encountered, and student experiences impact my CYC pedagogy?

If I return to my own experience during my undergraduate studies as a starting point, I feel that as I studied and spent time with peers in the program, I experienced a sense of community, safety, and shared culture like no where else. A quote of Michelangelo comes to mind to represent this experience of self-discovery "The greatest artist does not have any concept which a single piece of marble does not itself contain

within its excess, although only a hand that obeys the intellect can discover it.”(Ryan, 1998. p 150) In many ways, my education enabled me to recognize how deeply rooted I am in CYC perspectives. Perhaps this sounds a little melodramatic but when it seems that you view and experience the world in a way that those around you do not, you tend to feel, well, somewhat set apart. You wonder if there is something wrong with you, if perhaps you will always be different, I know I did. Before participating in my CYC education I had been educated in outdoor recreation management, adult education, and business management. I had worked in construction, retail management, sales, and provided natural history tours. I had done well in all of them and could have continued in any and been financially successful; however, that did not feel right because I noticed that I saw and did things slightly differently than others in those worlds. With many I shared similar thoughts, feelings, and actions but there was always a point of departure, often grounded in what I now know are my beliefs, values, and ethics. When I entered the CYC classroom, the words, actions, and processes that I experienced with the instructors and my classmates felt right. I saw how CYC was modelled, how it was spoken about, and how I experienced it in the milieu of the classroom helped me realize that I belonged in CYC. In my CYC spaces I saw and heard others reflect things that mattered to me, it mattered to them, they wanted to “be, do and know” about the world similarly to the way I did and so we shared a common world view. It was like attending a kind of family reunion but with relatives I did not know I had. For those not in a CYC practice realm I may need to explain this, basically you know each other’s way to see the world and you do not have to explain yourself and why you think, feel, and see the world as you do. I guess it is a form of familiarity. Family can produce some uncomfortable and difficult connotations for some, so before I go further with my metaphor, I would like to suggest that the CYC family I speak of is one where care, safety and compassion are core elements, at least as I have experienced it. In this family people seek to open the dialogue up and they express acceptance for uniqueness and diversity. Finally, I have also experienced family arguments; however, they don’t move to places of power and hurt. Rather they seek to land in places of sharing, equality, curiosity, compassion, and hope as they extend from a worldview of an ethic of care – again in my own experience.

Now as I paint a picture of my experience of the CYC family you may come to understand why I love being a CYC practitioner as it is a place where it is okay to not always see eye to eye; however, it appears to me we tend to be looking in the same

direction and describing a similar broader landscape. Now when I investigate CYC pedagogy in the classroom with CYC students looking back at me, for the most part I see this same experience occurring with them. This experience often shows itself in the two CYC 101-Introduction to Child and Youth Care I teach and yearlong CYC 310/410 practicum class I have taught for about nine years now. In CYC 101, I experience students seemingly recognizing either an early alignment between themselves and the CYC approach or recognition that they feel that alignment with another disciplinary view.

When students confirm that CYC is their human service field of choice they apply to enter the CYC degree program and as I have said previously, I believe this is when they choose to enter the four year liminal space of the degree where they experience transformation in a “Rite of passage” (van Gennep et al., 2013). I see it this way because it appears to me that students apply to the program so they can learn how to contribute to their community. They wish to understand what skills, talents, and abilities they possess that will help them develop and grow young people and their families towards competent, caring, and compassionate adults. They begin to sculpt their CYC self-concept to allow their CYC identity to emerge. My hope is that CYC programs across Canada see and facilitate this experience for students in a manner that is anchored in cultural humility rather than indoctrination.

In the first two years students in our program are introduced to the field and core CYC perspectives: relational, holistic development, strength based, ecological, social justice. We invite students to examine their beliefs, values and ethics, and their congruency with the CYC discipline’s world view, utilizing the process of Praxis. These first few years can be emotionally challenging for some because the reason they are with us to become a care provider may be due to the way they were or were not cared for themselves. This is where I believe our role as educators, or perhaps as CYC community elders (keeping to my family metaphor), is key. I feel that we need to model an ethic of care and practice cultural humility with them as we ask them to enter the liminal space with us to explore themselves, each other, and with me as we interact with the curriculum together. In doing this rather than talking about doing this I believe we are showing them how to be with others, this experience will then follow them into the field so they can then also be with others as they explore ideas, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Over the years it seems that the time when students will speak to the self-concept shift from “I am just a student” to “I am a CYC practitioner” most often occurs

during their third- or fourth-year practicum. In practicum they can move from learning about theory and their self-awareness to applying it in the early stages of their professional practice. We have practicum seminar as an aspect of practicum and here we ask student to choose several learning events from their time at the practicum site. In practicum I require students use Praxis with each other to unpack the learning and come to understand what they are learning about themselves through the learning events. I also require that each one of the students complete two in-person Praxis reflections with me so I can create an experience of what I am asking them to do with their colleagues – relational learning. Students often remark that they were unaware of how important learning with others is for identifying their blind spots and deepening their sense of self and their ability to use Praxis as a mechanism to practice responsible, ethical, self-aware, and accountable action (White, 2007)

In regularly observing the apparent shift in self-concept in our program over the past nine years I started to be curious about: 1) what contributes/enables a student's self-concept to shift; 2) is this "shift" experienced by students in other CYC programs in different locations or with different timelines (diploma vs degree); 3) what elements might educators be able to influence to support student self-concept shift; and 4) finally, how do I learn from these questions in order to build my pedagogical practice in a manner that might enhance my ability to support the self-concept shift so graduates are ready to practice in the field. A caution or a transparency I offer about my work, what I present in the section about my research with CYC graduates reflects only the voice of graduates who did identify that they made the shift. I cannot know or determine whether all students make such a shift. I also cannot know what may have been missed in the experiences of students who did not make this shift. Therefore, I consider this study to be descriptive in nature rather than predictive.

#### **1.4. How will the thesis unfold?**

In the ensuing chapters I intend to walk you through my investigative process showing you how I have come to understand "Who I think I am (becoming)" and how this understanding is woven with what students disclosed about their becoming, IPEC, UFV teaching, and workshops for new faculty and recent personal and cultural experiences. Along with written descriptions I will be offering illustrations/graphic representations so that it may add another dimension/perspective/voice to the work. I bring graphic

representation into this work as I feel it leaves the potential for a relational or an interpretive space providing opportunity for the reader/observer to connect with the material in their own unique way. My hope for this is that the graphic (re)presentation allows space for the reader to have their own relationship with the concepts and ideas potentially placing the knowledge in a relational space of meaning making, therefore inviting concepts to be born and transformed in a relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

#### **1.4.1. Why a Self-Concept focus**

For this study I chose to consider the shifting self-concept for student and instructor. Merriam-Webster's online definition of self-concept states: self-concept is the mental image one has of oneself. Garfat (2001) states that practitioner identity emerges from putting a person's self-concept into real world practice situations, the art of practice. So, in this work I seek to understand the elements of myself and my practice that enable me to do the art of practice.

#### **1.4.2. Coming to my inquiry**

I have come to this place in my life journey, a place where it has made sense for me to return to school to do a doctoral degree that investigates my practice. To present the information I have utilized a non-fiction creative writing format that is intended to: 1) enable me to present a more complete (head and heart) representation of how my life story has led me to this inquiry and how it has impacted me 2) to attempt to be "transparent" (to illuminate), thereby enter into a form of critical subjectivity into "who I am" to increase the integrity of my body of work. I intend to re/present myself in a manner intended to move your experience of me beyond simple facts to a connection with "the me" that is the writer/practitioner/researcher/little boy/person I am, bringing forth into your presence the tensions and emotionality of my life story that draws me to this inquiry and that illuminate my teaching pedagogy. As I do this, I admit to having a sense of trepidation, located in a place of insecurity, a questioning of legitimacy (self and process). As I bring my "self" into the scholarly dialogue, the private, unsure, and to some degree raw practitioner/researcher that I am through a non-fiction creative writing format, I wonder, is this form of scholarly expression acceptable, appropriate, or just "mickey mouse," Sladde (2004) shares my trepidation as she writes,

I recognize now that my vacillation stems from the pressure I put on myself to write in an academically accepted style that loses me in the process. The understanding I derived from my academic experience is that good, professional writing presents ideas and statements that can be backed up with references to works completed previously by credible researchers and writers. The assumption seems to be that what you are writing is grounded in "truth" — as long as somebody else said it. Although I can't reject this way of writing as valid, I do not hold it to be the only way, nor the most important way, and most obviously, it is not me. Taking back my control, I ask myself how do I want this paper to develop, what do I want to say, and how do I communicate in the written word most comfortably? (p.1)

Sladde (2004), a CYC education colleague at Vancouver Island University has provided me with a cultural context and a social permission to write in a non-fictional creative manner. At this point of trepidation, I admit that I also hear unanimous support from those who have taught us in the EdD program, encouraging me to see self-study/self-reflection and innovative qualitative methods as (valid and reliable) trustworthy and honest to be at the academic table.

### **1.4.3. How the work will unfold for you**

To present my work I intend to organize it into the following four chapters. In Chapter 2, "Cross-Canada check-up" I will offer the experiences and stories from my research trip across Canada identifying core learnings and outline what they have contributed to my CYC Praxis understanding of my practitioner self-concept. In Chapter 3, considerations I will invite you to explore with me how I make meaning of the work with graduates and how my own life challenges have impacted my pedagogy. In Chapter 4, "Conclusions and inspirations" I will bring all the information together and speak to main themes in the learning and how I see these themes play out in my current and future pedagogy. Finally, I present some ideas I have regarding how these learnings from the last few years might be useful for others that are transitioning from frontline practice to education and for educators regarding helping students shift into a practitioner self-concept.

## **Chapter 2. Cross Canada Check-up**

In this chapter, my focus will be on the relational learning gained from my collaborative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1999; Reason & Heron, 1995) research with Child and Youth Care (CYC) graduates from diploma and degree programs in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Nova Scotia.

### **2.1. Child and youth care education history**

Child and youth care (CYC), a discipline for working with children, youth, and family, is a relatively new discipline. The first CYC post-secondary program began in 1967, at George Brown College in Ontario, which also happens to be the year of my birth. In 1972, the first undergraduate degrees were offered at the University of Victoria in British Columbia and Ryerson University in Ontario. Today, Canadian CYC education provides a continuum of learning from a certificate to a PhD. In Canada, CYC education is offered in over 50 public post-secondary institutions (CACEJ/CYCEA, 2017), graduating approximately 1500 CYC practitioners every year.

#### **2.1.1. Why travel across the country?**

Initially the focus of my thesis was on self-concept shift in students and myself by conducting a collaborative inquiry with what I hoped would be 100-150 recently graduated CYC practitioners, in most provinces in Canada. I had designed the study so that I would travel from location to location in my Jeep Liberty, either sleeping in my car or camping, I intended to be on the land with the people. As I noted in Chapter 1, as a young person I was always outside on the land learning about the world around me so when it came to choosing a way to conduct the study it made perfect sense to get in a car and travel across the country meeting CYC folks in the places where they live, work, and practice. Additionally, I intended to complete an auto-ethnographic self-study to interrogate how my CYC practitioner self-concept was shifting during the cross Canada inquiry process. I was seeking to examine CYC practitioner self-concept relationally through the lens of “the other” (recently graduated students), “the othering of self” (graduated students and myself in group discovery and meaning making), and “the self” (self exploration and discovery). The significant purpose of the intended inquiry was to



examine what experiences, processes, and actions contribute to enabling a CYC student to move into their CYC practitioner self-concept and how I as an educator can help facilitate this.

### **2.1.2. CYC Pedagogy a background**

Early in the new millennium, whilst planning for National and International CYC conferences a dialogue opened through pre-conference meetings on the idea of professional regulation and the setting of standards for CYC public postsecondary education in Canada. This dialogue led to a research project funded through the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and hosted by Ryerson University. The process landed with a focus on identifying how to move ahead with an accreditation process for post-secondary institutions. Initially, a collaborative dialogue with 119 CYC educators from across Canada led to the implementation of a Pan-Canadian survey to assess the views of educators regarding developing an accreditation model for postsecondary programs and polled for interest in participation in the process (CACEJ/CYCEA, 2017).

In 2006, at the request of this collection of CYC educators in Canada who attended the international CYC conference in Montreal, a task force was struck to look at developing a flexible accreditation process for public post-secondary schools across Canada, the focus being consistency for enhancing the quality of care and service for children, youth, and families. Because of the task force activities, in 2010 a proposal for an accreditation model was provided and accepted. This was quickly followed by the founding of the Child and Youth Care Education Accreditation Board (CACEJ/CYCEA, 2017). As of 2016, public post-secondary programs in Canada are beginning to move through an accreditation process. The University of the Fraser Valley, Child and Youth Care Degree program was, at the time of writing, completing the process, and if successful, would be the first accredited program in British Columbia.

A component of the accreditation process is student and alumni evaluations to assure that students feel adequately prepared for practice. The student and alumni surveys are focused on "professional identity": Professional identity is encouraged through an exploration of the value-base Child and Youth Care holds as important and

communicating of those values to students. Students are expected to assess and explore professional and personal values within their coursework (CYCEAB, 2015).

This need to determine whether a program of study provides an opportunity for students to align personal and professional values, beliefs and ethics upon graduation is a key component in the accreditation process. To me this seems to suggest that the process of receiving an education in CYC is akin to a “Rite of Passage” a transformational experience (Grimes,2000.p. 7) that occurs when a student becomes a novice practitioner, entering a community of practice. Rites of passage, which can also be called “rites of transitions” are,

...a special category, which under further analysis may be subdivided into *rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation*. These three sub-categories are not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every ceremonial pattern. Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriages. Transition rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation; or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to third age group. Thus, although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated (Van Gennep, 1960, p11)

I am therefore suggesting, that a CYC education program is a form of Rite of Passage/transition and that the liminal space is the time between when the student enters a program of study or invocation (rites of separation) to the time of graduation or convocation (rites of incorporation). During the years of study (rites of transition/liminal space) students often report to me that they have experienced self-concept transformation, one that often brings them into a deeper congruence or sometimes discordance with “the self,” leading to graduation when they often identify as CYC practitioners and join the CYC community of practice. The liminal space refers to a zone between the different worlds of the self, and van Gennep (1960) identifies this zone, the liminal space, in the following way:

Whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds. It is this situation which I have designated a transition... (a) symbolic and spatial area of transition may be found in

more or less pronounced form in all ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another. (p. 18)

I suggest that a person in pursuit of a recognized publicly funded CYC education is on a deeply personal journey whereby their unique CYC practitioner self-concept emerges. I suggest that this experience must have students contact, connect, and move through processes, experiences, challenges, and dilemmas that are cognitive, spiritual, social, relational, emotional, and ideological through their educational program. Perhaps I could say then that there is a macro liminal process (the entire education program) that includes many micro liminal processes through the years (specific topics, peer relationships, peer conflicts, classroom experiences, interactions with faculty, etc.). I expect that these micro-liminal processes combine to help the student consistently reform their self-concept over the degree as they transition from novice student to novice practitioner.

This component of my work moved from being the only focus of the thesis, to being one of several foci. This shift occurred because I needed to introduce current experiences that were impacting my CYC educator self-concept and pedagogy. These will be covered in detail in other chapters. This section with the focus being on student experience and the learning gain from and with them is perhaps the strongest component because it speaks to the relationship between student, educator, and curriculum and the milieu of the classroom and the student/educator journey through the curriculum in the liminal space towards their self-concept shift.

Completing this aspect of the self-study was a pilgrimage to understand CYC practitioner self-concept. As I journeyed across Canada, I developed many important relationships with fellow educators and CYC researchers. Additionally, due to building these relationships I have been invited on to various boards and leadership groups in CYC education and practice, which has also contributed to a significant shift in my self-concept. One interesting element in relation to CYC pedagogy leadership has been that I am currently a member of the Child and Youth Care Education Accreditation board, specifically on the Education Committee. The education committee is focused on capturing the voice of educators and students to provide a stream of continuous quality improvement to the accreditation processes. Additionally, the education committee plans "education day" a preconference event prior to our National CYC conference in Canada,

sometimes we also concurrently host international CYC conference and which allows us to explore CYC pedagogy through a much larger lens.

## **2.2. Jeep thrills – my travelling research study across Canada**

In the next sections of this chapter, I will explore what I have learnt from and with CYC graduates across Canada. First, I explain the intended design of my self-study. Then I will explain the adapted version that occurred due to many life situations that impacted me and this work.

### **2.2.1. Research Plan surviving contact with the Canadian journey**

I had several unexpected experiences during the trip that led me to adapt the research plan. One aspect of the research process that I had not considered well was the effort it takes to drive across Canada from Mission, British Columbia to Neils Harbour, Cape Breton and back again, a total of 12,072 kilometers. Early in that journey I experience a powerful and significant challenge; my Jeep broke down after just six hours of driving. I was in a rural area between Manning Park and Princeton British Columbia, a community of 2,828 people, with no cell service. After many hours I was able to get the Jeep to a mechanic at his farm just on the outskirts of town. An additional early challenge was that all my camping gear was in my Jeep located at his shop. The first three days, a weekend, required I stay in a local hotel – an unexpected cost and delay. Eventually I was able to get my stuff and luckily able to camp at a city campground. Then we had an incredibly difficult time getting the parts I needed, including receiving the incorrect parts during the process. As we were in a rural area everything getting to the mechanic took time. In the end I convinced the mechanic to lend me his personal car to drive down to Surrey to pick-up the parts I needed. So, 10 days later I was on the road again, but the 10 weeks was now reduced, and I had to get to all the meetings and the Ontario provincial CYC conference. The first day after getting my Jeep in the late afternoon I headed to Edmonton 979 km 10 hours away. I drove that day until late and arrived in Banff. I had planned for many days in Banff so that I could have a moment of reflection. In the end I stayed two days and one night. Thursday, I headed to Edmonton as I needed to be connected to the internet and have a shower. I arrived late Thursday night which meant three nights in a hotel rather than the one,

another budget impact. This was causing more added stress as it was dramatically impacting my limited resources. I was paying for the entire research experience myself. I had budgeted \$3500 to \$4000 but in the end it cost nearly \$8,000 due to all the shifts in time lines, accommodation adaptations, repairs and alike. Finally, because of all the shifts I had to make it meant that I had to drive for many days in a row and often 10 to 12 hours a day, this significantly impacted the planned reflection time. Additionally, the level of fatigue I experienced was significant, contributing to the challenge of placing relaxation and reflection time into the experience. This component of the study therefore shifted and for a while bogged me down as I felt like I failed to do it well. During the trip and then for a while after I really felt like I had been placed in a washing machine, a front loader that had an extra strong spin cycle. It was quite terrible but like many crises it did open opportunities for me to have many wonderful moments and it did enable me to build so many important relationships and hear and experience CYC practice on the land where people learn, practice and live. Let us take a look at the structure of the study next.

### **2.2.2. Participants**

I had thought that it would be reasonable to access around 100 participants from the eight provinces and over 50 schools that offer diploma and/or degree programs in Canada. Additionally, I reached out to the eight professional associations across Canada with my research request. I left for the cross Canada trip in late May 2017, the previous months I completed an extensive outreach campaign to educators via phone and email; I ended up connecting with faculty in approximately 40 of the 50 different schools and all associations. I forwarded my recruitment flyer to all. I understand that the people I spoke to distributed to both their recent graduates from 2016 and the soon to be graduates of 2017, creating the potential pool of graduates be approximately 2400 people. At this point, I was very confident that given those numbers that I would easily be able to attract 100, but time passed and in the end, I was only able to conduct research with the following: six expected with four showing in British Columbia; four expected and three showing in Alberta; six expected with three showing in Ontario; four expected and four showing in Nova Scotia. To say I was disappointed with these numbers is an understatement; however, I felt that the main concept of travelling and meeting with students and colleagues across Canada continued to be a sound idea.

### **2.2.3. Design**

I had intended to use two methods for this study :1) collaborative inquiry (Heron, 1996), and 2) arts based autoethnography (Suominien, 2003; Fels, 2015). I chose these methods because I believe they enabled me to explore “the self,” “the other” and the “othering of self.” I believed this approach would enable me to provide an effective re/presentation of a Pan Canadian CYC practitioner self-concept of recently graduated CYC students whilst simultaneously providing an opportunity for me to inquire into my personal CYC practitioner self-concept therefore speaking to educators, specifically novice educators like myself.

### **2.2.4. Collaborative/co-operative inquiry method**

This method was developed in 1968-1969 at the University of Surrey, England (Heron, 1996, p. 1), which happens to be 20 mins away from where I was born. Collaborative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic together through their own experience of it, using cycles in which they move between experience and reflection (Heron, 2010, p. 117). Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases (Heron, 1996, p. 1). The defining features of co-operative inquiry are:

- All participants are as fully involved as possible as co-researchers in all research decisions – about both content and method – taken in the reflection phases.
- There is intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other.
- There is explicit attention through appropriate procedures to the validity of the inquiry and its findings
- There is a radical epistemology for a wide-ranging inquiry method that can be both informative about and transformative of any aspect of the human condition accessible to a transparent body-mind, that is, one that has open, unbound awareness.
- There are as well as validity procedures a range of special skills suited to such all-purpose experiential inquiry.
- The full range of human sensibilities is available as an instrument of inquiry (Heron, 2010, p. 117).

For the most part the inquiry traveled through the following four stages: 1) the first reflection phase -choosing a focus and path towards understanding 2) the first action phase – exploring and initial data collection 3) full immersion in a stage two process – bracketing perceptions and opening-up deeper exploration 4) the second reflection stage – co-researchers explore the second reflection stage material and meaning make. Subsequent stages involved 4-5 full cycles of reflection and action, with varying patterns of divergence (intentional separation of group members) and convergence (bring members together to explore separated outcomes) (Heron, 2010, p. 120).

To enable me to facilitate the cycles of reflection needed whilst travelling across Canada I utilized both electronic and in-person processes to ensure adequate opportunity to complete as many cycles of reflection and action as possible. I began the process by completing a group call where we discussed how the process would begin and then unfold. Each group decided when and where we would meet in person and how we would collect data (action phase) and analyze it (reflection stage). I appreciate this method of inquiry because it appears to me to reflect a relational epistemology and ontology (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, 2017) as the processes of inquiry are determine relationally.

The method appeared to me to be very similar to my CYC practice. Broadly it went like this:

- 1) I covered the informed consent process with the group.
- 2) The group identified a place that we could twice meet in-person – generally one of their worksites.
- 3) We decided that we would like the process to be informal, that we should have food and beverages and meet for two to three hours. During the time we were together we would try to cycle through two to three experiences and two to three reflections. They did not wish to record the meetings and instead they chose to individually take notes and then have a flipchart or large piece of paper for agreed upon themes.
- 4) After being together for the first day we took pictures of the large papers with the themes and shared these on a private drive so that folks could review them as they please in between the first and second in-person experiences.

- 5) We met a second time and pretty much repeated the same process. Each group met with a time difference between the first and second group processes since I was travelling. In British Columbia, meetings happened roughly eight weeks apart whilst Nova Scotia was one week apart.
- 6) Finally, all groups requested access to all the other groups work for one week to see if they wanted to adjust anything. All groups agreed to this, interestingly no changes were made.

The only group that did not meet in-person for a second time was the Toronto group. Each member had secured full-time work and we could not find a mutually agreeable time when I was travelling through Ontario on the return trip. However, we did arrange for a second group phone call whilst each member could observe what had been created previously. After we traveled through one complete cycle of experience and reflection, they decided that the information was complete, and they wanted it represented as is – a collection of statement that spoke to similar and unique aspects of their journey.

## **2.3. Arts based autoethnography**

### **2.3.1. Plan A – with needed adjustments**

Performative inquiry initially captured my attention through participation in Dr. Fels' seminar in educational theory: theory-making, embodied theory, Praxis. Dr. Fels invited us to explore our meaning making of the curriculum within our community of learners (EdD in practice cohort) using E-postcards as a method of performative inquiry. I expanded my understanding of arts-based methods for inquiry when I read Suominen's (2003) PhD dissertation: Writing with photographs, re-constructing self: An arts-based autoethnographic inquiry. Her work explored her shift in identity as she moved from Finland to the United States of America to complete her PhD. She used photographs and narrative writing as a way to dig into her historical, present, and future identity.

My initial idea was to have a day or two camping in a park to reflect on the conversations with graduates. Following my time of reflection I had planned to produce an E-post card that reflected a summary of the learning. I was then going to send it to a few folks to engage in a reflective conversation about the ideas I had summarized on the E-post card. As I had to condense the trip due to the break down of my vehicle I did not



have the capacity to reflect as often as I would have liked, additionally I was unaware until I was on the trip how the driving was going to impact me. I would often drive for long periods of time and end up being quite fatigued. Along with the travel condition impact on how I had planned to conduct the research I was also having to manage issues related to meeting with the graduates; a few times we had to shift days around so that I could get folks to attend. That said, I did have some opportunities to take a couple of days off, reflect and attempt to produce an E-post card but did not always have Internet service to send it out.

### **2.3.2. What is an E-postcard**

An E-postcard begins from a “stop moment,” “a moment of realization created during the creative process--an encounter, event, experience (or reflection of an experience) that calls us to attention” (Fels, 2015, p. 156). I see the stop moment being that moment that something in your world begs for your attention. I have experienced stop moments, both small or large. They are moments that request you to attend and connect. Fels (2015) invites researchers to consider that,

By identifying and attending to stop moments that call us to attention, we may reflect on why these moments matter; what issues, assumptions, perspectives, and practices (economic, political, social, communal, personal, cultural) are embodied within the stop moment; and why we chose (or failed to choose) to engage in a particular choice of action. A stop moment embodies pedagogical learning that is revealed through critical and creative reflection. (p. 153).

Fels (2015) asked pre-service educators to consider how their environment performs them (p. 151), to be attentive to how, the moment, relationships, the environment, and other aspect impact how we present ourselves to others. In other words, how are they, in-part, an expression of their ecological context and how does their environment sculpt their experience of being with students. An example of this might be the difference that teaching inside a classroom is from being outside, in the natural world. If you were teaching weather in the outdoors and it was raining your performance of connecting and teaching would be different from teaching the same lesson in the classroom. Additionally, what might be the difference if you were teaching a class of seniors compared to a class of kindergarteners. Fels (2015) encourages her students to consider “Whose script are you performing? And how will you choose to improvise your life?” (p. 151). In CYC education and practice we ask practitioners to “pay attention” to

the place in which they are situated, often within the construct of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (as cited in Stuart, 2013, p. 270) ecological model. CYC practitioners need to examine how the conditions that surround them enable or disable their capacity to be in relationship with the other and in some situations to advocate for self and others. Additionally, CYC practitioners are asked to take formal learning and theory beyond simple knowing, rather, to situate one's self within the learning and determine how they are performed by the who, what, when, and how they are, to be "aware" of self in practice, which is referred to as "Praxis." White (2007) defines "Praxis as ethical, self-aware, responsive, and accountable action (p. 231)." In other words, Praxis is at the centre of our knowing, doing, and being and is the active integration of them. I have been utilizing this form of Praxis during my years of practice. Due to the challenges associated with the implementation of the study, the core aspect of an E-postcard was maintained in my process of reflection; however, the process as identified did not occur.

In the next section of this chapter, I will be sharing with you the experience of the journey and data collected with the participants. I write this information in a narrative format as I wish to bring the reader into the experience. My rationale for approaching the work this way relates to the thesis focus. As this is a self study about self-concept shift due to relational processes and experiences, I feel that including you as if you are a companion along for the ride, is congruent to my ontological perspective.

### **2.3.3. Setting the scene**

#### ***1st meeting May 13th, 2017 - 2nd meeting July 8th, 2017***

In this next section, I will cover the experience with the participants in the lower mainland of British Columbia. We met twice, once at the beginning of the journey and then approximately eight weeks later. In BC, the group decided to track their investigation through individually developed, then shared, pieces of emergent thematic writing. They decided on this approach to the research process because it seemed to be aligned with CYC practice that is interdependent, relational, and synergetic.

### **2.3.4. Beginnings – The highs and lows of research with people.**

It was a wonderful morning, sunny with white puffy clouds, and a perfect temperature, 12 degrees. As I moved out my front door and down the steps, I passed

the fresh spring flowers while heading towards my Jeep Liberty, my travel companion for the next 10 weeks. I recall woven feelings of excitement with subtle elements of concern. Over the previous weeks, I had spent many hours immersed in communication processes, planning, and preparing for my “cross Canada adventure,” study trip, my CYC pilgrimage. I have conducted a few research projects over the years and that day I noted the familiar, turbulent set of activities and emotions that seem to be part of the research process. In my experience, research often involves polarities of emotions and moments of action and interaction. You can feel great, gliding along, the world seemingly aligned with your needs and desires. Then, a roadblock or two hits, often related to challenges with resources or people, and this can generate feelings like frustration, annoyance. Occasionally, these challenges cause you wonder whether what you are trying to do is impossible. In the latter moments it is hard not to participate in crisis-based chicken little thinking, “the sky is falling, the sky is falling.”

As I noted earlier, I started the first day with bright skies and a happy thought walking out my front door to my Jeep liberty; I was off to meet my BC cohort, the beginning of the research. Over the past weeks I had been planning and preparing for the entire cross Canada research trip, I had reached out to eight Child and Youth Care Associations and approximately 50 public post-secondary institutions. In BC, my backyard, I had been reaching out to colleagues at the University of Victoria, University of the Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island University, and Douglas University. Additionally, I had mined all my local networks, for what ended up being six recent graduates to participate, that was a little disappointing. However, this experience offered some important learning about researching CYC pedagogy. It would be helpful for future researchers to have some sort of infrastructure or processes that enables them to connect more effectively to CYC students and graduates to harness their wisdom.

Returning you to the story, I was travelling along highway 11 from Mission to our Abbotsford meeting place. The familiar buzz of my phone let me know that text messages were coming in. I pulled over, with trepidation I looked at the messages and saw that people’s lives were leading them in a different direction for the day, and I was quickly losing folks for the day’s activity. I had already adjusted my personal requirements and expectations of 10 to 12 participants to six participants and had to convince myself that this would be a “representative sample.” So, as I went over the Mission bridge my once clear path undergirded with enthusiasm and excitement began

to shift to one of tension and worry as I considered the legitimacy of this study, or what I considered to be the study's trustworthiness and honesty. I was actively telling myself that I had done the best I could, and that I should accept this for what it is, that is why we have a discussion section in a thesis anyway. Also, I had to remind myself that this research is descriptive not predictive.

I arrived at Abbotsford Save-on-Foods to pick-up the fruit, vegetable, and meat and cheese platters. Then, I shot over to Starbucks for the box of coffee with all the fixings. Another text message, a child is sick and requires their parent to care for them so they cannot come, down by two now. As a CYC professional you would have thought I would have been very supportive of this parent staying home with their child, well... not so... I can offer a dark secret, in that moment I despised that kid. So... I took a moment and sat in the Liberty and wondered, what I should do? Cancel today? That would put all the other plans in jeopardy. I had prepared meeting dates and places with groups across Canada. So, like I told you I would do, I went straight into catastrophizing and wondered whether I should develop another study, one that does not require so much travel and immovable timelines. I jumped to all the other elements that were getting in the way of the romantic ideal of the study. I thought how ridiculous of me, what audacity to think that I could simply phone colleagues across Canada who would then connect me to a bulging and pent-up group of recent CYC graduates that would be willing to come on a Saturday, twice, to talk about CYC practitioners' self-concept emergence, what was I smoking?

I admit at the time I did have a little tear pass by my cheek on the way to the floor at that moment. Then... another buzz... with much hesitation I looked at my phone with one eye closed, I was sure it would help. The following is what I read, "Hey Mark, I am running a little late but am really looking forward to participating today. This seems like such an important study, I don't know why others haven't asked us what we think works in our education, Thanks 😊." That is all I needed, I was back, there was the hope I needed, I started the Liberty and off to the meeting. That day I enjoyed a wonderful conversation with three amazing CYC practitioners who offered some important ideas and insights into the CYC education experience with some clear points that connected to the self-concept shift I was looking to uncover.

### 2.3.5. Meeting with Graduates

I had arranged for our conversation to occur at the local child development centre, we were in their groups room, no charge to me, a benefit of the good working relationship I had with them. When I arrived one of the participants was already there and helped me bring the food and refreshments in and helped with set up. Until now I had only electronically met this person, but as I find with fellow CYC practitioners we were immediately connected. Then the other two arrived, we completed all the paperwork, informed consent and alike, then we got into the dialogue.

To capture the key aspects of our conversation the group had asked I bring a large roll of paper and markers so that we could all write over the walls with key ideas or thoughts that percolated. In this room we were surrounded by white boards, so we went that route instead. As we started into our dialogue it became evident that for this group each member had been working in the field prior to entering their CYC education program, in fact it was the reason they returned to school. Two were now graduates from a degree program and the third was a diploma graduate who was now continuing to complete a CYC degree. This meant that the conversation about self-concept emerged in relation to obtaining CYC credentials. Early on they stated their recognition of how what we were doing seemed to really represent the CYC approach to practice, one participant noted this in their thematic writing,

For this CYC research group, the emerging themes and the outcomes of our discussions grew out of *collaborative inquiry*. I very much appreciated this approach. While it was Mark who initiated the meetings, he did not set himself up as the director of the project. Instead, we all had equal input into the discussions as partners with a curiosity for thoughtful, critical analysis of experiences and a synthesis of ideas. (Written except from thematic writing)

In this first meeting, and as a result of the multiple movements between action and reflection, the group decided on the following foci for our time together, "we identified two emerging themes, common to our experiences, that shifted our self-concept from simply CYC student to CYC practitioners: *experiential learning* and *relational self-care*". Additionally, they decided to hold the following question as a lens for the inquiry, "does practicing in the field while studying part time lead to a shift in self-concept?"

### 2.3.6. Discovery of a CYC community practice



One member of the BC group chose this image to visually represent her CYC practitioner identity emergence as the anchor to her piece of writing about what she came to know through the collaborative inquiry.

One focus for the group was curiosity with each other regarding why they had returned to school to complete a CYC diploma or degree. Each spoke to feelings of burnout and frustration at their workplaces. They stated that they all experienced that their work with young people was not being respected (see image below as their visual representation of this experience) by their colleagues with knowledge and credentials in disciplines such as criminology, psychology, teaching and social work.

I often found that the perspectives of ‘the line workers’ were not necessarily respected to the same degree as others’ were at the multidisciplinary table. In fact, I distinctly remember in one meeting being told to “stick to my observations and leave the interpreting up to the professionals. (Written excerpt from thematic writing)



They stated that their colleagues recognized that what they did worked it just did not look like the way they practiced and since the CYC folks could not articulate why they were doing what they were doing it led to others seeing them as “lucky” rather than “talented.” All members of

this group identified that when they could identify and name their actions with young people grounded in CYC theory, competencies, and practice approaches that their colleagues began to shift their perceptions of them. They stated that now colleagues were asking for their support in working with young people. Additionally, they noted that then their workplaces shifted and began to embrace CYC practices such as: holistic development (Ramage, et al., 2018 p. 7) , utilizing a trauma informed lens (Mattingly et

al., 2020 p. 15), hanging in and hangout (Garfat et al., 2018 p. 23) and relational CYC practice (Garfat et al., 2018 p. 20) to name but a few. As a result of their education, they were able to have their self-concept shift to seeing themselves as CYC practitioner and their colleagues also shifted their recognition. Instead of being seen as “lucky” with young people, they were now seen as talented CYC practitioners that had a unique skill set that contributed effectively to the interdisciplinary workplace.

Another focus connected to choosing to return to school was a discussion on their shared feeling of being lost, disconnected, and a little burned out because of the way they felt at work. One member described it as a “life storm” wanting to do better but not knowing how too. All noted that when they entered their program of study, they felt justified in the work they were doing and felt validated because now they were learning that people in the field had written and identified what they were doing, and this enable them to now describe and deepen their work.

### 2.3.7. Relational Self-care



Another aspect that was reported by the graduates that contributed to the self-concept shift was a focus on Praxis and self-care (see their chosen image above). As I listened to them speaking about Praxis and self-care it felt like a familiar conversation unfolded between them. The conversation they were having reminded me of what often emerges between learners in our program that are not also practicing in the field. These learners will speak to experiencing fatigue around the amount of reflective practice we

ask them to do, they do not realize the importance of this practice; however, this often changes during their third- or fourth year during practicum or once they graduate.

The folks in this group, all of whom worked in the field, expressed that they recognized how important reflective practice was to them almost immediately. They stated that practicing self-awareness and self-care enabled them to process difficult work experiences and not feel burnt out at the end of a shift. As the conversation unfolded and deepened, we landed on an interesting idea that has been a powerful learning experience for me. We were exploring Praxis reflection and identifying how the two programs they were from had some subtle differences in the teaching around Praxis reflection. This led to one of the participants saying the following,

I learnt in our program that we are not supposed to carry experiences from work home with us, as that will lead to burnout. Sometimes, I wake up at night and I am worried about a family that I am working with, is that bad self-reflection or self-care?

I found this to be a beautiful question and what happened next to fundamentally change the way I practice Praxis and self-care myself along with the way I teach it. Another participant said,

I am not sure it is good or bad. I think I need to know you better. If this happens often and it causes you to lose sleep or feel burnt out, then yes this is not a good form of Praxis I think.

The conversation of the group revolved around this idea for a while. We concluded that this idea of building a relationship with a colleague for Praxis could be called relational self-care. We further recognized that this is a component of being a professional, the responsibility to consider your actions with colleagues in the field to assure that you are practicing safely and effectively. They stated that until you feel like you are a professional you tend not to share your concerns for fear of being judged; whereas, when your self-concept shifts to seeing yourself as a CYC professional you see no other choice but to seek support around practitioner vulnerabilities.

Self-care is sometimes misunderstood in the workplace. Often, we will talk about how important it is to leave work and do your self-care on your own time. We reinforce this message in the workplace all the time. However, I just don't find this to be professional or even practical. Professionals are always learning and aiming for constant improvement. This doesn't turn off at the end of the workday. Some of my best ideas, insights, or reflections on practice have manifested while I am away from work: in the car, at home,



walking, etc. Is this an acceptable and generally non-problematic level of taking your work home with you? My suspicion, based on experience is yes: as long as it doesn't cross over into the realm of invasive thoughts. (Written excerpt from thematic writing)

This aspect does have one caveat, you do need to find other CYC practitioners to do this with because the culture has a process to unpack experiences – at least with the folks in BC.

### **2.3.8. Experiential learning/Practicum**

Another theme that emerged was recognition that in the CYC programs the time of experiential learning really contributed to making the self-concept shift. There were two main thrusts of experiential learning that were landed on, part of the conversation did speak to the sometime frustrating experience with working in groups; however, the main thrust of this dialogue was on the power of experiential learning, specifically, in supervised practicum to see themselves as CYC practitioners.

Out of our discussions and reflections on experiences grew a sense among the group that for CYCs, experiences such as quality practicum placement with good supervision and generous peers can provide *supported vulnerability*...As a group, we all agreed that part of what gives us an identity is getting out of our own comfort zone and into what we call the stretch zone. It is in this uncomfortable, but supported, place where experiential learning takes place. Experiential learning can challenge compliance and convention and is key in becoming a CYC practitioner. (Written excerpt from thematic writing)

We spent a great deal of time circling around the experiential learning that occurs in CYC programs. I found it enlightening how through the cycles of action and reflection we began to consistently end up on how they describe effective pedagogy it resembled effective CYC practice with those we serve.

In practice, I am frequently reminded and keenly aware of the ripple effect; that single actions or interventions have lasting and changing impacts. In fact, we know that our actions can be transformative in positive ways for those we work with, so on the other end of the spectrum we are cautious about negative effects in other cases. However, if I honestly consider this, I know CYCs believe that we are only the agents of change, and that the ultimate ability to affect change is in the client themselves, then perhaps negative impacts can be somewhat mitigated. It is almost as if through the CYC understanding of resilience we allow ourselves to take these calculated risks. Sometimes when we ask these questions, it can be difficult

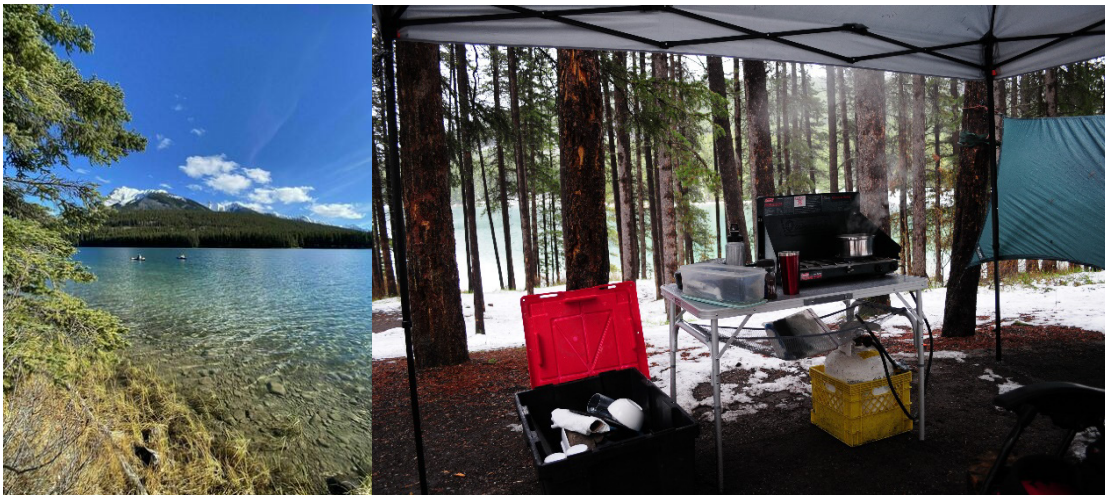
to know the answers, but this is the heart of reflective, and actually exemplary, practice. This is part of what helps us to become confident CYC practitioners. (Written except from thematic writing)

One last focus that emerged from the group process was the value of taking time with others to reflect on CYC practice as a form of lifelong learning, or perhaps being involved in a community of practice.

In fact, the research group itself can be considered an example of the concept of relational self-care. We all acknowledged the therapeutic value the sessions themselves had on us. Taking time on a day off from work to share thoughtful, challenging reflections on practice left us all energized and eager to return for the next session. This is dedicated reflection on practice, learning and theory. Out of our group, the beginning of yet another circle of relational self-care has begun to take shape.

## 2.4. Edmonton

**First meeting May 27th, 2017– 2nd meeting June 24th, 2017**



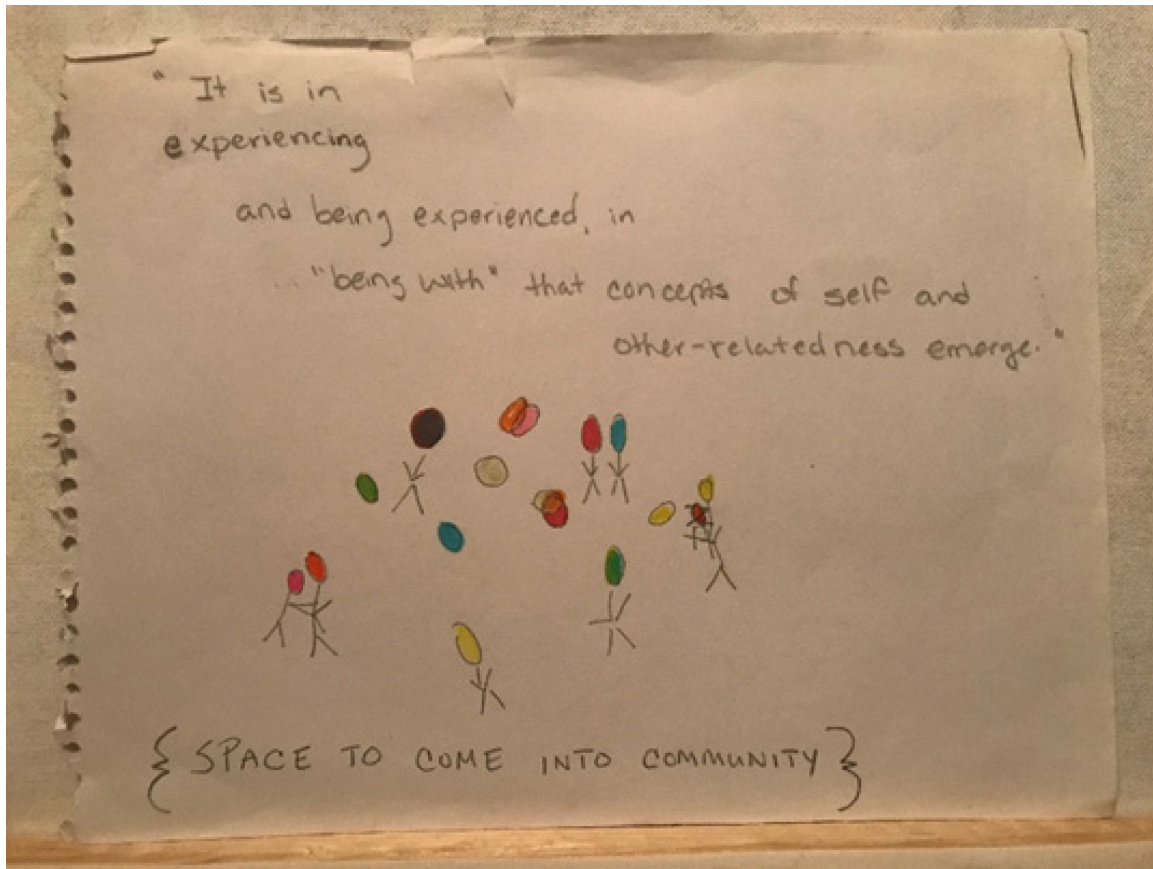
It had been quite a journey so far. The previous year I had spent a few weeks camping and hiking, so I thought that being back in the mountains would be great. Originally, I had planned for close to a week in the mountains to reflect on the BC experience; however, in the end I was there for two days and one night. The evening I arrived it was

a beautiful sunny spring day in the mountains, those days are hard to beat. I set up my camp and then started to prepare food, I absolutely love cooking outside. It was a great meal supported by an amazing micro-brewery IPA. I walked down to the lake and sat beside the lake soaking up the mountains, lakes, and clouds. I relaxed into the chair and let the stress go of the initial part of the trip and look forward to being with the new group in Edmonton. I could still be in Banff for a while, good enough. As it does in the mountains, the weather was shifting, an evening light shower, a lovely sound to go to sleep to. The next morning, I woke warm and cozy in my Hammock tent. The air was cold. I unzipped the fly on the hammock and there was snow falling. It looked like it had fallen all night – beautiful, peaceful, serene.

I left Banff early partly due to weather and partly due to wanting to be in a place with running water and bathroom facilities. I had already been on the road for almost two weeks with around 10 days of travel and camping. I arrived late Thursday afternoon. The experience with the participants was going to occur on the Saturday and I decided rather than take off Saturday night I would wait until Sunday so I could enjoy another stress-free night without the need to travel and find a place to sleep.

#### **2.4.1. Space to come into community**

Once again before the meeting I picked up food platters and beverages from the store and headed to the meeting place. This time the location had been secured by one of the participants. They had been able to get approval for us to use one of their offices, a space often used for family visits when children have been temporarily removed from their family's care. It was a wonderful little space full of toys and other family friendly elements. The other participants showed up and we all chatted, and they caught up with each other as we set up some flipchart paper and hung some big pieces of paper around the walls.



**Figure 2.1. Image of their developed title by Edmonton group**

As you can see from the image above, the Edmonton group agreed to summarize the title of their experience as "Space to come into community." Further, the group supported the image with a poem to summarize the experience, "It is in experiencing and being experienced, in 'being with' that concepts of self and other-relatedness emerge." They used many images to represent key ideas from our learning journey, they were a creative group. I hypothesize this maybe a result of two elements: 1) several projects they did in their program in which they were asked to use art-based ways to represent learning; 2) one member tended to express her thoughts through art renderings of ideas.



If the eye is the window to the soul [to who I am], I must learn to see again, to see a new. Throw rocks at my ideals and test their strength, cradle my broken pieces gently in your hands [I may want them yet], help me swap out pieces [share some of your own] [I may try and reject and choose again] as I create a new picture of myself, a lense to view and act upon my world [the me that I discover, and the framework I come to know + embrace] and when I stretch out my window framed and ready, will you let me hang it in the gallery you call "ours"?

Figure 2.2. Edmonton group -Stain glass image with poetic expression on self concept development.

Along with this artwork one member forwarded a recording explaining the pieces. “The agreed upon picture is an image of a person in stained glass, notice its cracks and missing pieces. The hands on the bottom are holding pieces: missing pieces, broken pieces, or extra pieces”. The poem is the written expression to support the art. The following quote summarizes a main idea found in our research journey together:

Students coming together to explore and then to own their Praxis, the professional self-concept. To then stretch it out to the CYC community and to ask is there space for me, is there space for the self-concept that I have developed. Is there diversity enough within our definition to allow for the individuality of a student’s self-definition of their self-concept Praxis?

The group identified that they felt that their cohort had a strong connection to the faculty at MacEwan University and it was one of the key aspects that allowed them to shift. They discussed that they felt the classroom was safe for them to experience the material and unpack its meaning. They felt that faculty created safety to agree with or challenge ideas and concepts in the classroom. They also expressed caution around safety. Safety of the milieu, the classroom, is a requirement for individuals to engage in deeper learning that challenges them personally; however, if there is safety in both the classroom and person that this could mean that folks are being compliant with the ideas rather than thinking and acting critically about the concepts present in the curriculum. What the Edmonton group expressed here reminds me of one of my favourite Parker Palmer (2007) quotes:

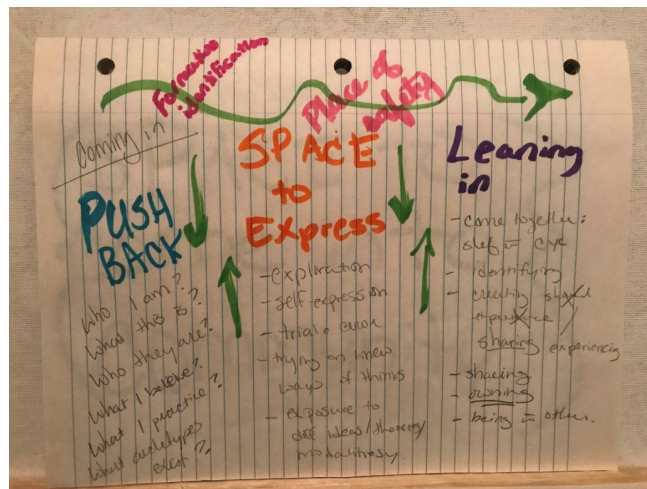
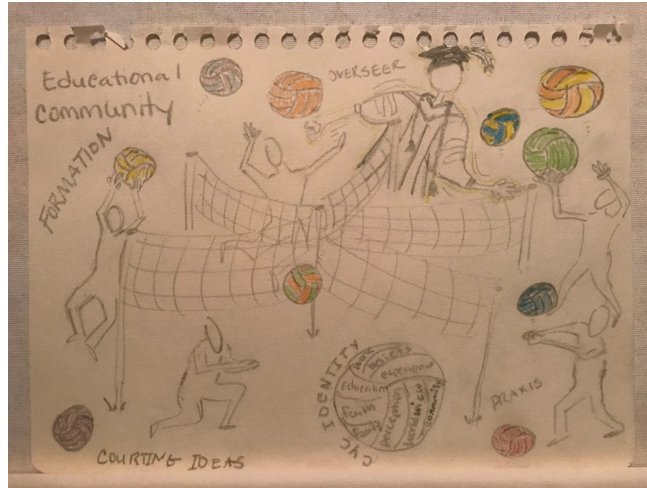
I want to learn how to hold the paradoxical poles of my identity together, to embrace the profoundly opposite truths that my sense of self is deeply dependent on others dancing with me and that I still have a sense of self when no one wants to dance (p. 75).

Another aspect that the group explored in relation to safety and the idea of compliance rather than deep learning occurred when they discussed an approach shift towards assignments. They suggested that when folks in the program started to identify that they were a CYC professional they stopped worrying solely about the grade and started to consider critically the information they were presented with in relation to professional practice. This meant that they would start to consider how to meet the learning outcomes of an assignment’s potential in a different manner than the assignment directed, basically asking to do the assignment differently than presented.

Referring to the relationship between faculty and student they talked about how faculty in the program offered scaffolding for folks, often on an individual basis. They discussed that faculty were effective at identifying each person's unique gifts and abilities. The faculty would encourage the student to see their unique gift and use it to explore the learning together. Group members identified that, at first, they borrowed the belief about themselves from faculty before they shifted their self-concept when they then believed the gift was in them. Then when they connected to the learning it was in a way that was transformative, as their view of the world shifted to seeing these new things through the CYC lens, a CYC self-concept shift. This appears to relate to Kolb's learning cycle, as identified by Stuart (2015)

Experiential learning is not about simple knowledge transmission or simple application of theory and knowledge to practice. Teachers and supervisors who support experiential learning and reflective practice do not "tell" people what to do. They help them to engage in a learning cycle that includes active and concrete experiences, observations and self reflection on those experiences, the distilling of an abstract knowledge that is linked to experience and reflection, and then the application of that newly formed knowledge to a new experience. (p. 56)

Finally, the last aspect related to relationships in the class that impact the shift from student to practitioner relates to peers. They talked about how, when the faculty creates safety, peers interact with each other and test out their perceptions and ideas related to theorizing their practice, this process they call "supported vulnerability." They likened this to a big volleyball game where ideas were tossed between each other over multiple nets, and they called this "diversified learning." They shared that later in their degree folks in the classroom would also be in practice whilst completing the degree. This enables students to learn from and with each other regarding how the idea (or theory) looks in real world application or they could challenge each other and faculty regarding how theory looks in practice. The next two images were their visual representation of the concept.



## 2.5. Toronto – Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care Conference May 31st to June 2nd

There were many things at the Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care annual conference that impacted my expectation of what Child and Youth Care education is and should be. The first experience I present is the keynote by Heather Snell, this was a keynote like no other I have experienced, it was performed using dance and spoken word poetry by CYC students and graduates. The focus of their work was on exploring the relationship between faculty, students, curriculum, pedagogy, and ideology.

### 2.5.1. The Ontario CYC conference Keynote

Heather started her keynote in a traditional way, then slowly shifted as others entered the frame and were performing with and around her as she shared her ideas



with us. This visual presentation effectively showed the point she was asking us to consider, “how we can challenge ourselves to do CYC pedagogy differently”?

Heather asked us to consider the following questions: 1) what is the reason for child and youth care education? 2) is CYC Education the delivery of theory and facts or is it the preparation of students for practice? To focus this point she asked the audience of students, graduates, practitioners, and educators to consider what they remember about their program of study; perhaps you remember a fact or two, perhaps even a theory. Heather then invited the audience to consider how many learning and evaluative processes were relational in nature. This keynote seemed to be congruent with what the graduates were saying helped them shift their self-concept; the idea of a living curriculum that builds experiences with students in ways that mirror CYC practice seemed so clear and so focused at this point for me.

Another aspect of this keynote concerned her idea of “the inside and the outside.” Heather invited us to consider how much of what we do inside the classroom reflects what we do outside in the practice arena, how CYC friendly was your education? Was it congruent with CYC practice? Were final exams relational experiences? Was evaluation strength based? Did the academic institution meet you where you were at, or did you experience anxiety about where you stood? The questions Heather asked us to reflect on have illuminated for me how challenging it can be to offer a CYC relational education whilst meeting the academic rigor requirements of a traditional publicly funded post-secondary institution. I welcome and detest the echo of these questions as I develop and implement curriculum with students. This knowledge consistently invites me into the tensions and challenges of being a relational educator.

Heather offered that the task that we have is to try to teach “care” in an institution, a very troubling challenge. In academic programs we are tasked to teach content or learning outcomes; however, CYC practice is about process. So, Heather challenged us to consider the difference between the “what” and the “how.” The “what” is the curriculum, and the “how” is the delivery of that curriculum. She asked us to consider whether we might be continuing to reinforce a lack of focus on “care” when simple things like the structure of the classroom continues to reinforce power, control, influence. Do we continue to walk into classroom spaces where the front of the

classroom is where the faculty deliver information towards the back of the classroom, hoping that those in the middle will absorb the knowledge?

Finally, we were invited to consider a different approach, one she has recognized since becoming semi-retired, and practicing pedagogy at a slower pace and more informed by CYC practice. She noted that she had been able to see the classroom and the students... differently. When she entered the classroom, she could not tell where the front and the back of the class was. She recognized that the “inside” and the “outside” of the classroom was blurring. She noted that when she was listening differently: she heard invitations to a dance; she heard invitations to build relationships; to embrace narratives and learn wisdom; I understood things... differently. As the keynote ended Heather had left the stage and was in the audience, the students took over with spoken word poetry about their ideas, life experiences, and their relationship with CYC education while dancers presented visual forms of the words that offered tensions, triumphs, and struggles in their experience. This was such an honest, transparent, and congruent way to show us the struggle that is present as students and educators connect to curriculum built in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI).

The other aspect of the conference that impacted me was seeing so many students present. They had been brought by faculty in their programs to attend and in some cases present. It was powerful to the relationships between the students and the faculty. As you moved around Humber College you could see groups playing, singing, and enjoying each others company. I took the opportunity to chat with some groups of students about what I was doing in my research. As they chatted with me, they landed on two areas that were important. The first was a challenge for us to face as a discipline. One aspect that I noted that is different between CYC education in BC and Ontario is the diversity of culture and the number of students of colour in the Ontario programs. This was the first challenged they told me about, how can we shift to seeing ourselves as practitioners if the educators do not represent/look like us. This concern was also present in the educator’s day that I attended prior to the provincial conference. This disciplinary challenge was present before we had the conversation that came out of black lives matter. The second learning from my chats with students was that they focused on relationship, relationship, relationship. The students expressed that the most important aspect of their education was how faculty represented the field of CYC. When they had faculty that were CYC practitioners themselves and practiced that way

in the classroom they could witness what CYC was and then adapt their own ways of being.

### **2.5.2. Ontario graduate group - Representation**

After the conference I had the first conversation with the graduates, that was almost a continuation of the chats I had with students I met during the conference. The participants in this group identified that it was important for their development to have faculty that were CYC faculty. They described experiencing a difference between CYC faculty and non-CYC faculty. They described that a non-CYC faculty was a faculty who had received their education in another discipline such as: social work, psychology, criminology, etc. They explained that in their experience that non-CYC faculty acted differently towards them and their peers, they were not as relational. This experience for them created conflict between what was being taught and what was being experienced. They built on this and explained that sometimes when non-CYC faculty tried to add detail or complexity to a concept related to working with youth and families it appeared divergent to the core principles in CYC practice. However, when they had a class with a person who had a CYC background and had practiced in the field they would see the work and the theory as congruent. Further, they explained that CYC faculty would more often invite them to examine CYC concepts in relation to their own life/work experience. They reported that this approach to learning, inviting them to see themselves applying, practicing, and becoming CYC practitioners was helpful. It seems to me that once again students are speaking to needing to experience “safety,” in this circumstance cultural safety. I suggest they are speaking about congruency between practitioner/educator, student, curriculum, and the discipline.

A second area that these folks landed on was about having faculty who validated them as people and practitioners, facilitating a sense of support as they moved rhythmically from knowing to not knowing. Once they had internalized the learning then they did not need the external validation of faculty through marks, they could recognize in themselves what was CYC practice and what was not CYC practice. This is when the group spoke about the self-concept shift. They stated that “it does not occur quickly, rather it becomes a sense of confidence that sits with you. Then one day you sort of realize that you are a professional CYC practitioner who is responsible for the care and support for young people”. They also spoke here that “this is also when

you realize that your own story of challenge is a strength that can come to your practice and that you can care about rather than control young people”.

Another focus for this group related to cultural diversity of the faculty team, they softly framed this as structural oppression. Two of the three graduates identified as black Canadians, and they spoke to an early internal anxiety/oppression because many of their peers and most if not all of the faculty were white. The group spoke about their experience of being in a minority group being taught by 99% white faculty meant it was hard to see themselves in CYC practice, it presented an internal struggle for them. However, they explained that as they travelled through their education and gained more self-confidence, they were able to self-advocate and voiced their experiences. They stated that in their program at Humber this conversation was embraced and encouraged. They were so thankful to their peers and faculty for opening the space for this dialogue. As this occurred, they identified that it also opened space for a CYC self-concept shift where they saw a role for themselves in the CYC practice world – “cultural advocates”. Near the end of this part of our dialogue they voiced with pride that they had been able to influence hiring practices so new hires at the University were becoming more culturally diverse.

The Toronto group members identified an aspect of self-concept shift that occurs in practicum that was reflective of other CYC graduates in Canada. They stated that practicum was a time where they were exposed to situations that helped them trust in the knowledge that they had learned. They spoke about facing a crisis/experience at their practicum site that called them to action. They spoke about using Praxis reflection as a mechanism to explore the crisis/experience. When they went through this process, they often surprised themselves with how much they knew about CYC theories, ideas, and processes. They reported that this experience was important to their self-concept shift, their words were: “We have the same brain as before but now we are using it differently.”

Further to the idea of recognizing the learning that had occurred in their program during practicum, they added another aspect of what could be called assimilative learning. The Toronto group spoke to an experience of rhythmicity in their learning, a process of moving back and forth between knowing and not knowing. They identified that this rhythmic process of stepping between two ways of experiencing themselves,

illuminated that “learning evolves as you become aware that often you only know what you know when you are requested to attend to an experience that calls you to action”. They identified that during the rhythmic process, you become aware of what you have learned and what you need to seek deeper learning or new learning about, pulling you into the concept of lifelong learning and ongoing professional development.

## **2.6. Nova Scotia – 1st meeting June 11th; 2nd meeting June 17th**

### **2.6.1. Storying for CYC self-concept transformation**

With the Nova Scotia group, I discovered that story: telling, creating, and listening was most often chosen as the pedagogy of choice. The group discussed how the knowledge transfer of CYC theory and practice was often done through storytelling. They discussed experiencing different forms of story from raw and emotional to highly processed and constructed. They identified that they experienced story as a method to engage with the concepts, processes, and theories of CYC. One story that the group shared involved a young man in a group home sticking his genitals into a vacuum cleaner. This story was used to explore normative development, sexuality and sexual health, report writing and self-awareness and personal bias.

To highlight aspects of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) story would be told from different perspectives and/or an alternative story (social, cultural, gender, etc.,) would be used. Here students also spoke about how the faculty would invite students to share their personal experience from different social culture and gender positions to explore a CYC concept. An Indigenous graduate identified that through this process they could tell their “ghost stories from the reservation” and that helped them see their resilience. They also recognized that their peers would then better understand the impact of colonization on Indigenous folks in the region.

Many students talked about using story to practice their CYC practitioner self-concept, a formative approach to self-concept shift. They would unpack themselves through story and they would then recognize how their story identified where their struggles were and how they could process their story of struggle to become a story of resilience. Here they also spoke about using story to explore how they might work with

different child, youth, and family experiences and what would inform them about the way they would do this. I would consider this a Praxis approach to CYC self-concept development where students are asked to consider their “Being, knowing, and doing” to use a framework to develop an intentional practice orientation.

They recognized that story was also a faculty pedagogical tool to invite them to experience the challenges of practicing in the field. They explained that there were two types of stories, dark and light. Dark stories were stories of challenge and complexity that included the faculty’s raw and authentic emotions and experiences. With these stories the lights were off so that those in the room could feel safe to be with their own emotions, also perhaps it was dark so faculty could be safe as well. Faculty shared that they told these types of stories so students could vicariously experience that the field also offers practitioner painful and incomplete stories from the folks we work with.

Another element of story that the group landed on was related to intimacy. They spoke about choices that faculty would make about the size of the group when stories were told. They identified that large group stories (light stories) were used as a mechanism to introduce CYC concepts, ideas, and theories. Then there were times when folks were put into smaller groups, four to six folks, to engage in storytelling that would not likely require high levels of self-disclosure or intimacy but more so than in the larger group process. However, if the intention was to invite folks to connect to personal and/or challenging concepts then groups would consist of two or three folks. Additionally, more time was allotted so that folks could tell their story, process it together, and identify the learning. Folks reported that these invitations were difficult but so important as they would be therapeutic experiences. These therapeutic stories would allow them to process their challenges to move them into their resilience. In telling the story to others you learn how to “live with it.” They expressed that these forms of storytelling also allowed them to identify where they had “blind spots” in their emerging practice that could impact their work. Finally, they reported it helped them experience the field of practice in a highly supportive environment prior to being out in the field on their own.

Folks stated that story was occasionally used to explore white privilege, early in the learning this area did come with relational tension. Initially if the subject of white privilege was brought up by a white person it would be ok; however, if it came from I

non-white person that person was classified as the “squeaky wheel.” Later in the program it was identified there was a shift by the cohort, it now was seen as JEDI truth telling.

Finally, the one area of their program they spoke to that did not land in the genre of storytelling was the program’s ideology related to personal responsibility. The folks identified that in the geographic area they were going to work in most organizations utilized accountability case management (ACM). This approach to human services work identifies that folk could not offer excuses to experiences, challenges, or situations they found themselves in. It was suggested that in this approach offering of excuses could frame people as being victims of their circumstance. In the program, like in the field, students would be expected to practice in an accountability case management framework, to be response-able to the program, themselves, and each other. This meant that students had to recognize that they could not offer excuses rather they had to identify what reasons and choices lead them to the concerns or challenges. Folks stated that this ideology (ACM) in the program was uncomfortable but needed because their “bubble of reality” was clouded, and they had it burst in the program. This was framed by one member of the group as, “I learned to trust that the faculty would hold us accountable and be 100% behind us to be the most successful person we could be.”

## Chapter 3. Considerations

In this chapter, I will examine in more detail the learning presented in Chapter 2; however, I will also be taking creative liberty, and weave some new information that has been pulled from my life events since completing the initial cross Canada trip. The purpose is to enhance and deepen the considerations I am offering regarding my CYC pedagogical self-concept. My self-concept, maybe like yours, is messy. My self-concept forms in the liminal space of my relationships, experiences, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and time. I imagine that my self-concept has a sign on it that states – “permanently under construction.” As the words land on the page, it has been approximately four years since my learning journey began. During this timeframe, I have walked with my life partner through her journey with cancer, during COVID-19, whilst she lives with an anxiety disorder. This thread has connected me deeply to vulnerability, empathy, existential crisis, and freedom experienced from letting go of previously held levels of importance for what matters in life. I have worked with children and families for close to 30 years, and the work I have enjoyed the most was situated in high intensity, emotionally charged, and complex mental health realms. Today, because of the recent life journey with my partner and COVID-19 impacts on teaching practices, I do not think I could do that work, the level of mental, physical, and emotional fatigue I feel today has impacted my capacity to tolerate complexity.

At the time of writing this document, I have secured a full-time faculty position at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) in the Child, Youth and Family Studies department. As an assistant professor I am required to enter the system of Tenure and Promotion, a three-year process of learning, peer and student evaluation, and the development of an Individual Probationary Evaluation File (IPEF). Finally, UFV as a teaching intensive university provides all new faculty with a course release in their first year so they can participate in “The new faculty professional development program.” This is a cohort-based model to support new faculty who are developing their teaching skills. As this thesis speaks to my self-concept formation, which is permanently under construction, I will be taking some creative license and including new information from the other life threads as stated above. This will allow me to consider the interrelatedness or the complexity of exploring the weaving that produces the “who that I am” becoming.



As I thrashed around trying to shape this section of the writing, I reached back to the middle of the EdD in Practice journey when I was introduced to the work of Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon. Thayer-Bacon (2017) asks us to, “imagine that the world we experience is like a vast ocean and we are afloat on this ocean in a boat, like Pi in *The Life of Pi*” (p. 1). That as we float around on the vast ocean of experience,

We must design nets to help us catch up our experience of this vast Ocean and make sense of it. What we use to make these nets are our theories of knowing (our epistemology) as well as our theories of being (our ontology). There are multiple kinds of epistemological and ontological nets we can design, maybe even an infinite variety, some more effective than others, in terms of the amount of Ocean life they are able to catch up, some are more beautiful, some more durable, or more particular to their sought-after catch. Whatever epistemological and ontological net we use, however fine the weaving, there is so much more in this vast Ocean of experience than our nets can catch. When we cast our nets, much will overflow the top of our net as well as spill through it and escape back into the infinite Ocean. We cannot divorce ourselves from epistemological and ontological questions for they form the very weaving of the nets we use to catch up our everyday concerns and give them meaning (p2).

As I enter into the meaning making aspect of this chapter, the relational “net” I weave requires threads gathered from my CYC discipline. Here I will add threads of CYC Praxis (White, 2007, 2015); CYCCB competencies (Mattingly et al., 2010); BC Education consortium learning outcomes (Rammage, et al., 2018); and the characteristics of relational CYC (Garfat et al., 2018).

### **3.1. Theme 1 – Ethical Integrated Acculturation**

All participants from the British Columbia group, attended their Child and Youth Care programs in post-secondary institutions because they felt that in their workplaces, they were not considered a professional. They expressed that they felt they had less status in interdisciplinary working groups (care teams) and were either seen as lucky when they successfully supported children, or disregarded when they offered interpretations of children’s behaviour within the Care Team that did not align with the dominant disciplinary focus this is reflected in the previous referred to quote

I often found that the perspectives of ‘the frontline (CYC) workers’ were not necessarily respected to the same degree as others’ were at the multidisciplinary table. In fact, I distinctly remember in one meeting being

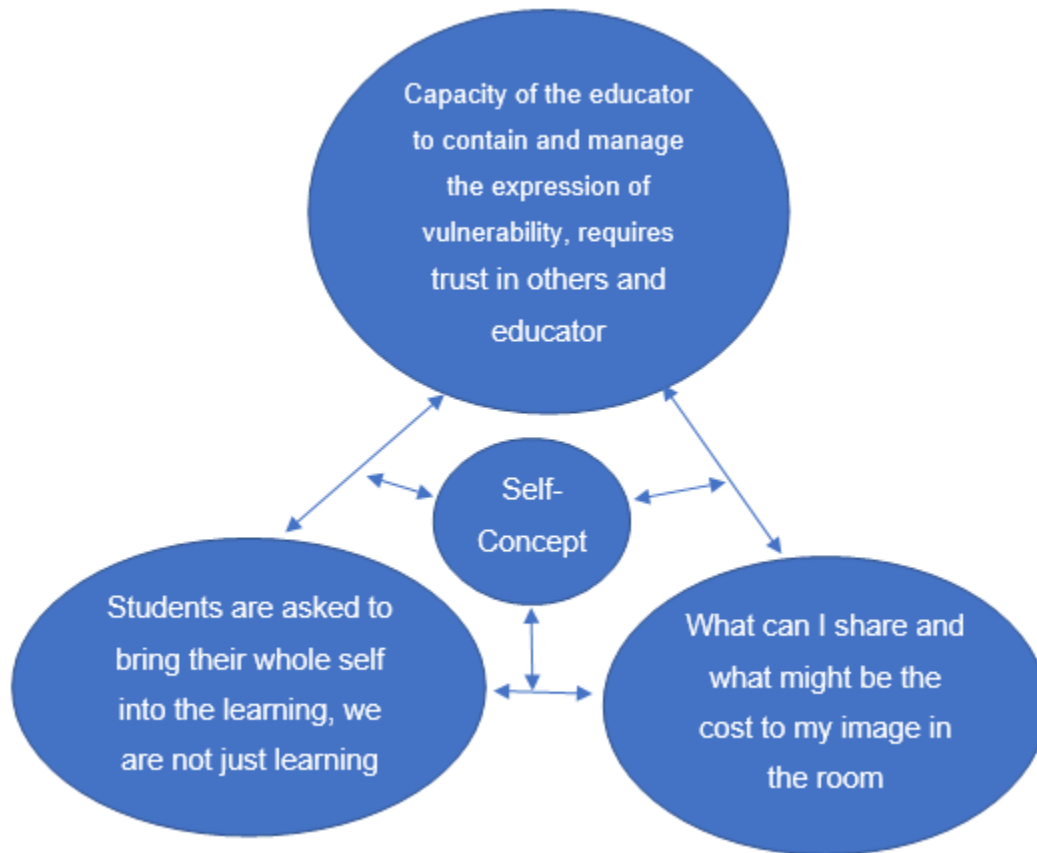
told to “stick to my observations and leave the interpreting up to the professionals. (Written excerpt from thematic writing)

The situation of Child and Youth Care practitioners being seen as less skilled and unprofessional (Garfat et al., 2018, p 18.) has been a theme in CYC practice since its early beginnings in North America in the 1960s (Stuart, 2013, p.38). In those early days CYC practitioners were happy to be called “Child Care Workers,” they were paraprofessionals doing the bidding of professionals such as social workers, educators, psychologists, and psychiatrists most often working in residential care settings (Stuart, 2013, p.38). Henry Ford, although a proponent of people working for good wages and being seen as valuable to the workplace also had a reported complaint, when he wondered, “why is it that when I hire a pair of hands, I get a human as well? I hypothesize what he wanted workers to do was to complete the task they had been given, not to think about it, and consider another way or perspective. Early in the field, CYC workers accepted that they just needed to complete the work required. Since the 70s, when the first CYC degree was offered in North America at the University of Victoria to now where we have approximately 40 public post-secondary diploma programs and 10 undergraduate degree programs, CYC students have been receiving a formalized curriculum. This has led to CYC graduates and those in the field wanting to be recognized as a qualified professional at the interdisciplinary table, a professional who offers a unique disciplinary focus to children, youth, and family. Basically, the CYC practitioner of today wants to have their skill set recognized and utilized.

As noted in Chapter 2, participants explained that they entered their CYC programs because they were treated like workers rather than practitioners. As a result of our study, they understand what contributed to their self-concept shift to be a CYC practitioner. They recognized that it occurred when they were able to be in practicum or especially in their workplaces and present to colleagues on the “what” and the “why” of their practice undergirded by the unique CYC body of knowledge and the distinct way CYC’s practice. As mentioned early in this work I am a graduate of the program I currently teach in. I entered post-secondary because I also felt unheard, disregarded, frustrated, because I did practice well, I just could not identify and speak to what it was I was doing. As I moved through the degree, I gained confidence as I was working and going to school, and at work I could explain what I was doing. I remember that in the winter semester of my third year, my self-concept shifted from student to practitioner. I

had an experience at work where I decided to voice an interpretation of a child's behavior by citing CYC theories: relational practice; applied child development; and a resiliency focus (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018; Mattingly et al, 2010; Rammage et al, 2018). I remember leaving the meeting feeling amazing because I had influenced the team's approach by speaking to CYC theory. Additionally, because I spoke so clearly through the lens of CYC practice, I had surprised myself, regarding how effectively I was able to advocate for the young person (Freeman et al. 2017), at that moment I felt that I was a professional. So, as I heard the BC participants speak to a similar aspect in their journey, I felt I had landed on something important for me to remember and integrate into my CYC pedagogy. As I design a course I need to consider how to implement as much experiential and applied learning and applied evaluative processes as possible because it supports a self-concept shift for students.

Stuart (2013) identifies that for child and youth care practice to be seen as a profession viewed through the functional view of professionalism requires that our discipline accomplish the following: formal education; organized/distinct body of knowledge; clientele and colleagues that recognize authority; professional culture or association; autonomy and self-regulation; service to people; and a code of ethics (p. 161). I suggest, given what I have learnt from the participants in the study, that these aspects of professionalism do not reside outside of the practitioner, rather, professionalism resides inside of them, education helps them locate it to form a cultural way of being with a language, values, concepts, etc. that is shared with others – a relational self-concept perhaps? Or could I suggest that this is a form of ethical acculturation, one in which the shared knowledge developed through relationship between, students, peers, educator and curriculum is a milieu where an individual can find their “self” concept relationally? Perhaps, one could label this form of learning as apprenticeship; however, my bias since being in the field from student to educator, is that I experienced it as more like a family and community mentorship model, one that seeks to develop people in ways that are more than skills; rather, one that seeks to develop a whole human – body, spirit, mind, and citizen. This theme of emergence through a “living the curriculum” that began in BC showed up in all the groups; however, in slightly different ways. When the Edmonton group landed on it they identified it as “safety.” They developed the image below to represents this concept.



**Figure 3.1. Edmonton group – image to explain the concept of safety.**

They also stated that as this process was occurring in the classroom around curriculum that the faculty were fundamentally important in holding space for “risk” and “safety.” Further, they explained that the shift seemed to occur when faculty would begin to know and see each student as a uniquely developing practitioner – again like the field. They experience it themselves when faculty would share with them what they saw as their CYC practice “gifts” that will be their offerings to the field of practice. They said, “at first when you heard them describe your “gifts” you could not see it in yourself, in fact you sometimes did not believe them. The sense of being with others who have similar core values but needing to be with them in a personally unique way that offers “safety” and “risk” is another element for me to remember in my pedagogy. This idea emerged from the Edmonton group in their chosen graphic representation and poem ( figure 2.2), specifically, the last line where the question is asked “...and when I stretch out my window framed and ready, will you let me hang it in the gallery you call ‘ours’?”

Next, I wish to weave together the offering from the statement above and link it to various core competency frameworks of our field: A Model for Core Curriculum and Related Outcomes to Inform Child and Youth Care Education in British Columbia (CYCECBC) (Rammage et al, 2018, p.7); Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Practitioners (CYCCB) (Mattingly et al, 2010, p17); Characteristics of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach Revisited (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018). The CYCECBC document represents an agreement between all BC public post-secondary institutions regarding the outcomes of CYC education. The document frames the outcomes of learning for students with a focus on preparing them for field practice; the language speaks to practice with children, youth, and family. If I can reframe the wording to reflect a CYC education milieu, I would like to simply change out the term from children, youth, and family to CYC student, faculty, and institution. When we shift this, we consider how student and educator connect in the classroom to examine the curriculum. This aspect of relationality would have the student and educator involved in co-creating and “being in” therapeutic relationship with each other (Rammage et al, 2018, p. 7). At this point I wish to illuminate what “therapeutic relationship” means in CYC practice. Unlike other disciplines that often experience the term therapeutic relationship as one that has a history with a colonized and medical model approach. In the medical model approach, this often means that there is a client and a clinician who experience a therapeutic relationship. In this model it tends to have an expert (professional) and a client (person with a pathology), this is a different model than is present in CYC practice where we see the person served as the expert – in themselves. In ethical CYC “therapeutic relationships” I am speaking to the responsibility on the part of the CYC practitioner to be with people in shared relational and authentic ways...within inclusive, rights-based, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed framework that extends from the inter-personal relations to the engagement of systemic and institutional features of injustice (Garfat et al., 2018, p10). I admit that being with CYC students this way as they travel through their degree can make the work we do so much more complicated than conventional ways of teaching. In this approach to CYC pedagogy that I have been able to practice in our CYC department at the University of the Fraser Valley, it has meant that we do as much, if not more, work with the whole student as we do with focusing on our core role in the institution of curriculum delivery, research, and service. Our departmental team seeks to learn about the person, the student. We seek to understand who they are, their story, and where they wish to grow

as CYC practitioners and people. We form therapeutic relationships (caring relationships) that are built in holistic development, a strength based approach, informed by social justice and an inclusive orientation to people development (Rammage et al, 2018). I suggest that this makes the CYC pedagogical approach responsive, recursive, and it deals with the complexity of an interdependent model of teaching and learning. As a usual aspect of my teaching practice, I make space to be with a student to explore what they are learning, I am curious about more than whether they are just getting the facts, I am interested in how they are making meaning of the information in relation to themselves. As a team we also approach whole person learning as we focus in our monthly department meeting on students for 30-45 minutes sharing information with each other about how students are doing, and students are generally drawn to some of us more than others. Do we need to bring more support to someone? If someone is going through struggle, how might we adapt things for them? In many ways this is like the type of work we do in good quality residential care – where we began. When students work through their assignments, we invite them to explore deeply who they are and who they are becoming thereby developing self-awareness and their CYC practice, their way of “being” in child and youth care. I would suggest that this is doing CYC practice with students as they become their own best practitioner. In conclusion, I suggest that a theme in the information offered by graduates in the BC and Alberta programs was the sense of “safety” for “risk-taking” that brought faculty, students, and curriculum together in a therapeutic relationship to bring students into congruency with the field. I have labelled this as “ethical integrated acculturation.” This experience was a relational ontology built in a relational epistemology that lands in a community mentorship model of transformational learning. This approach to CYC education that resonated so strongly in the BC and Alberta group also seems to effectively answer several of the questions that Heather Snell asked in her keynote address in Ontario that I mentioned troubled me: How CYC friendly was your education? Was it congruent with CYC practice? Were final exams relational experiences? Was evaluation strength based? Did the academic institution meet you where you were at, or did you experience times of anxiety about where you stood? I believe that my personal practice and our UFV team approach is attempting to shape CYC education in this way. We have a good start, but we also have some areas to grow. It will be my responsibility as I continue to grow as a CYC educator to bring Snell’s questions further into my practice and our program.

### **3.2. Theme 2 – Do you see me?**

I continue to reflect on what the graduates in Ontario offered me as learning combined with Snell's recognitions regarding tensions between CYC education and the ideology in post-secondary institutions. The graduates from Ontario spoke to a few issues that helped or hindered their movement into practitioner self. The first challenge they noted can be viewed as possible challenge and perhaps opportunity, the fact that some of those teaching CYC in post-secondary have been taught in other disciplines. This is an interesting aspect of a CYC post-secondary education that you can be trained in another discipline such as social work and teach CYC. Whereas, in other disciplines such as social work, education, and nursing for example I believe you are required to have credentials in those disciplines to teach the discipline. I wonder, and following on the graduates' concerns, if a faculty has been acculturated in another discipline would they likely represent that disciplines approach to learning, relationships, core competencies, and ways of intervening. If this were true, it indeed might create confusion; however, it could also be seen as opening a dialogue into the interdisciplinary experience that all human services practice in. Viewing this through a strength-based lens, we could imagine the educator utilizing a Praxis approach to identify, communicate, and model their disciplines approach and then contrast this to a CYC approach. Perhaps this could offer recognition to learners of difference and provide a transparency that could lead to fulsome dialogue and learning.

When I first entered teaching, the department head of the UFV CYC program was a faculty who had trained in education and saw herself as an educator. She had been teaching in the program for over 20 years and had been one of my educators as I worked on my degree. I remember that as I went through the program, I had experienced times of discordance and disagreement. At the time I did not understand why this was happening and likely, knowing the younger me, would have made it personal unlike the graduates from Ontario. As a colleague I would say that this person continues to offer me stretching and growth opportunities as we sometimes see how to provide CYC education differently. The idea of having CYC trained educators providing CYC education is likely a lively conversation for our field.

Another aspect that the Ontario graduates spoke to were issues related to Indigenous, Black and people of colour (IBPOC) with a particular focus on faculty representation linked to CYC student voice. The graduates felt that in CYC programs the faculty body should be reflective of the community of students that are taking the program. The students shared what it was like to have a very small proportion of the faculty team being non-white. They reflected that it felt a little unsafe to open up the conversation regarding racism, privilege and decolonization in the classroom with white faculty early in their education. They did go on to share that as they moved through the diploma, they felt that most of the faculty actively created space for the IBPOC conversation to weave into many CYC classes. However, they also noted that conversation was encouraged but needed to make sense to the faculty. One of the graduates noted,

if the white faculty deemed the conversation worthy it would happen. If they did not it would not, but how do the white faculty know what it is like to be a black CYC practitioner in Toronto? They don't. So, they still need more diversity in faculty so that faculty understand what it is like to be a black person then you will see that all conversations matter.”

As I write about this learning from the graduates in Ontario, I must disclose that I am relating to this learning differently than when I first heard it. When I first heard this information in Ontario as a white man in my 50's it landed with some discomfort. I felt embarrassed, guilty, and frankly naïve to the matter. I thought I was acting adequately in this area of my practice, but in hindsight that was the naïveté speaking. I returned from the trip; the discomfort continued to permeate me slowly. I must admit I became a little frozen with fear and self-doubt as I could not figure out how to move forward. If I admitted what I did not know, would I get fired by the university as I was supposed to know this, right? I mean I was getting my EdD and had been in Child and Youth Care practice working with folks from various social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. What I recognize now is that in the field these questions rarely turn up in team meetings, training days, supervision or few practice areas. In the year of the study as we returned to teaching in the September semester an opportunity unfolded for me that would allow me to work on this aspect of my practice. Our team decided that if we were to decolonize and Indigenize our program we first needed to do this ourselves. One of the team members had been working on the revitalization and modernizing of the CYC Consortium Education Outcomes recently and they had worked through a list of



questions that open up conversation developed by Wendy Simon - Mohawk/Haida, NEC Native Education College & Artemis Fire - Métis Nation, Camosun College. As we took the next academic year to explore these questions together it allowed me to open up and share my secret. It was a safe and comfortable place to grow and learn. One last note about this area it is important to note that this conversation occurred prior to the larger national and international conversation that stemmed from the black lives matter social movement. As a result of that movement, we have decided in this 2021/2022 teaching year to all read *So you want to talk about race?* and have that anchor us in our further exploration. I am so thankful that our team encourages us all to do this work.

### **3.3. Theme 3 - Storying**

When I arrived in Nova Scotia, I had been on the road for over a month. I was really looking forward to connecting with Kelly Shaw. Kelly's practice was familiar to me. She had written several articles in CYC journals about her work, and it seemed to align with many of the ways in which I practice. Additionally, we had chatted on the phone a few times as I prepared to meet the graduates from Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) where Kelly is a faculty member in the diploma program. The day I arrived I was invited to an evening celebration of some faculty and a group of Indigenous students who had just finished a two-week residency in Turo from their Northern Labrador communities. They were completing the NSCC diploma in Child and Youth Care as a cohort as their communities had worked with NSCC to offer a specialized program that had most of the education completed by Kelly in their home communities. The experience of sitting and eating with this group of students and in some cases their young children framed my NSCC experience early. After introducing myself to them and talking to them about my research project, I was offered a plate and directed towards various food choices. They were having a potluck, a usual process for this cohort. Kelly explained that sitting and eating together was a core aspect for this Indigenous cohort. It was a cultural practice that Kelly felt could be added to their regular program because it seemed to really enrich the relational teaching and learning approach. In field practice, food is often an aspect of joining together and talking about strengths and challenges facing children, youth, and family. These students spoke so highly of the faculty and how the program was so flexible in the way it supports their learning. These

students, also spoke to the experience of storytelling as part of their learning journey. They offered that they appreciate the faculty and the program because it reminded them of the way they experience teaching and learning in their home communities. The cohort offered that at home we use stories to teach our children about the land and the animals, we use story to connect ourselves to the past and the future. In this program they use story to connect us to CYC competencies.

As I reflect on my experience in Turo, I wonder if story is so present in the program because it is on the east coast, a region of Canada known for storytelling. Additionally, the people of Turo are tied to the land and the ocean as the primary industries are fishing and farming work, areas where storytelling is common. Also, Turo is a small community of approximately 13,000 people, a shire of Colchester County. The area has been home to the Mik'maq people for millennia. Turo is known as the Hub of Nova Scotia as many roads and railways intersect here. Along with the people's relationship to land and water, you can see that the settler community has been present for years as many of the homes and buildings look like they were constructed in the 1940s and 1950s. I spent a few days in Turo and as I went around eating in various coffee shops and restaurants, I overheard many conversations. As is likely true for many small towns, people were talking about friends and family, updating each other – basically stories of people's lives. I guess what I am trying to say is that "story" was all around me.

The image below is a picture of tidal bore moving up the Salmon River.



This occurs twice a day when the tide enters the Bay of Fundy. This experience was one that created an “opening” for me, as I encountered the land, people, and culture. One day after lunch I drove around town. At one point I pulled over into a parking area that looked like it might be used on the weekend for a farmers’ market or fruit stand, and I was going to have a quick nap. I got comfortable in my chair and listened to some gentle music. Then I noticed that several cars were parking on the far side of the parking lot. It seemed like people were falling out of the cars and trucks and were like a parade of ants moving into a shrubby area that led to the river, I wondered what was going on. So, I walked over and followed an ever-growing crowd to stand on the riverbank. I was a little confused as there was a wide expanse of clay covered pebbles and a little water meandering along the clay bed, maybe five feet wide. I remember thinking this is weird, this river is not like one of the beautiful rivers we have in BC, why is it so appealing. Then people started to talk and point down river, the water was streaming upriver almost like when a 55-gallon drum of water falls over and covers the ground, this was the first wave. Apparently, the first wave slowly fills the base of the riverbed. Next, with more chatter occurring the much larger wave moved up the river like a miniature tidal wave, travelling at 4-5 km an hour I would guess.

The crowd buzzed with joy as the wave moved up and past us. People began to talk about times they had seen surfers riding the wave upstream. At this moment I got it, the connection to the land and the rhythm of nature. How each day there were experiences that generated stories that connected people to the land. This was what Turo was all about.

I returned to my car, sitting and listening to music as I reflected on the journey so far. I realized that I was at the halfway point. That after the week or so on the east coast I was going to return to BC. At this point in the trip, I had been immersed in many stories, thoughts, challenges, and experiences. I was physically and mentally tired but also felt privileged to have been able to connect to fellow faculty, CYC students, and graduates. I was feeling a little like I was being steeped in CYC pedagogy and practice. My story was unfolding, and it was teaching me about the importance of “storying” our way into “knowing.”

### **3.4. Theme 4 - Relational practice development**

As I consider the learning from the BC and Alberta participants, I believe that I need to recognize where I am with my own CYC pedagogical self-concept – utilizing a Praxis to locate this. In a simple way I believe what I need to do is continue to be a CYC practitioner, but in the milieu of the post-secondary classroom. I need to intentionally do more to integrate my field based CYC self-concept into my CYC pedagogy self-concept. In the revised characteristics of a relational CYC approach (2018) it speaks to “being in relationship,” which means engaging with a person in an intimate and profound manner (p. 20). When I reflect on a strength-based approach to holistic development (Mattingly et al., 2010; Rammage et al., 2018) and “being in” therapeutic relationship with students, the participants in Alberta noted this as an important element of their self-concept shift. As we already heard from them, they stated that

sometimes faculty would share that we had skills and abilities that we did not see in ourselves, as we went through the program, we then started to see in in ourselves.

What I think is happening here for students is that they land in a CYC degree rather than say social work or teaching because something resonates with them about the CYC worldview. During the program that “something” is requested to be brought forward and then is sculpted through pedagogical interactions with peers, curriculum, faculty, and sometimes their current work. This relates back to the idea of a rite of passage. So, as we hear from the BC participants it aligns that students transform their self-concept when they can gain through the curriculum a language and knowledge base that allows them to speak with other professionals and influence the work that is occurring with families and children. For me this is an important recognition as I am now

tasked in my pedagogy to generate learning opportunities that enable students to share our approach to practice through various genres of written and verbal expression.

The BC participants stated that they believed that experiential learning, where you are doing the learning, worked best for them to understand what it feels like when you think and act CYC practice. They also stated that they felt that experiential learning occurred in their workplaces. They stated that compared to peers who are not working in the field that they felt that their self-concept shifted a little earlier than their peers because they could apply what they were learning Tuesday night to what they were doing in their Wednesday morning shift. They all agreed that the program helped them “find their voice” to be able to understand themselves and see themselves as equal to other professionals. As a result, they found themselves challenging conversations and practices in their workplaces, being able to offer a CYC disruption to interdisciplinary practice.

As I consider my own experience of a disruption in CYC practice, in 2010 I returned to UFV as a sessional instructor. As I entered this new role of “teacher,” familiar feelings returned to me, I was unsure and vulnerable. I believe that at the time my self-concept was back to being a student, this time a novice Educator. I had wanted to teach at UFV in the CYC program since the day I graduated from it. I wanted to teach successfully and become a full-time faculty; however, I had received little to no training on how to teach. Walking into the classroom I had expected all the students to be passionate, dedicated, and driven to be the best practitioners they can be. I expected them to be, well, like me. I had a large learning curve ahead of me. I remember being in class as a student thinking teaching is not so hard, was I ever wrong about that. I knew how to be a CYC practitioner with children, youth, and family. I knew how to work through difficult and complex challenges with people. When I entered the classroom, I think I forgot about “being” a CYC practitioner as an educator. I believe I was so concerned about doing the “right thing” that I was not doing me. To accomplish this, I needed to look in control, in charge, making it all happen. I was focused on doing the “right thing” rather than the “wrong thing,” even though I had no idea what that meant. I first felt that what I needed to do was prophesize, to fill classroom space with my voice. I felt that students needed assignments that were large and complex demanding a student’s complete focus. Additionally, I felt that the role was being a gate keeper to the field, I was the person responsible to weed out those who could not or should not be

CYC practitioners – basically a passionate mis-informed rookie, I was really “doing to” the students rather than with them – that is the CYC approach. So, I think early on in my teaching career I was telling people what to do to be a CYC practitioner but not being CYC with people myself. In Stuart (2013) Phelan (p53) offers stages of professional development. The first level of Phelan’s model seems to effectively describe where I was when I first began teaching, Level 1:

The practitioner focuses on personal safety. The focus of skill development is implementing external controls, routines, and reinforcement related to client (student) behaviors. The practitioner values expertise and looks for correct answers.

Garfat (as cited in Stuart 2013, p. 55) has a four-stage model of practitioner development. When I began teaching, I believe I was in Stage 1 and 2:

Stage One: doing for

Characterized by insecurity but deep caring, this stage can lead to confusion about roles and boundaries. The worker helps the youth to feel good about themselves and arranges experiences for success.

Stage Two: doing to

Characterized by a more directive role, the worker begins to identify what the youth “needs” and to construct experiences that will provide for those needs or attempts to stop the youth from engaging in dangerous or risky behavior

### **3.4.1. Reframing my education milieu**

The educator tends to feel some insecurity about themselves and the knowledge they hold. The insecurity tends to have the educator focused on leading students to the curriculum and learning outcomes – high structure. There can be subtle role confusion on the part of educators as they navigate a CYC practice approach in an ideology that requires academic accountability frameworks. This can lead to power dynamics between student and educator as the educator success gets wrapped up in student success. Teaching strategies rely on pre-built processes with little room for the educator to open the learning up to students’ perceptions of the material. The relational orientation between student and educator reflects a “doing for and/or to” approach as the educator seeks to be liked by the students, colleagues, and institution.

I do not believe I left this level until just before I started considering the focus of my EdD in practice research, I refer you to the teaching crisis I described earlier in this work. At that time, I had been sessional teaching for approximately eight years and had been able to secure some regular course offerings and felt very supported by the current department head, colleagues, and to some degree felt students appreciated my approach to teaching. It took this long to leave the first level, at least for me, because the sessional or contract role is very difficult. When I first began teaching the department head and I did not experience a great deal of trust towards each other. I also found it difficult to become comfortable with the course material because I would rarely teach the same course twice. Also, for many of the courses I taught I only received the syllabus and text for the course, often just a month or two before I had to go into the class and teach it. I often did not reach out for help as I felt that I should know the material and know how to teach because I had been hired to do so. Maybe if I told someone what was going on I would be fired because I should know this stuff. Designing the entire course and then teaching it once is complex for me. I often over prepared had way too much material and did not know what would take students longer to grasp.

Those were difficult years. In many ways this would be like expecting that a CYC practitioner who has worked in say recreation programming could just show up for a new job, say in family outreach work, and simply go out into the field and be immediately successful. When we consider this approach to bringing a person into a new milieu of practice, we might consider this approach of providing minimal support and direction at the very least as neglectful towards an employee and in a worse case situation potentially harmful to those served. Yes, the practitioner would be able to start doing the work but would that be the best way to practice. They do not want to get fired and lose their job so how would they feel?

I started my field work with children in the late 90s, during my time in the field the CYC position has been labelled the following ways: childcare worker; youth care worker; child and youth care counsellor; child, and youth and family practitioner. Today the title most often used, other than in school settings, is child and youth care practitioner. This title offers the holder the ability to bring their whole self to work, heart, head, and hands. We formalize this approach when we teach students to think through their practice using Praxis. As I complete this theme, I am left with the assertion that to

be effective as an educator of CYC practice that at its core it is being relational with students, colleagues and the curriculum.

### **3.5. Theme 5 – Pedagogical dancing**

As an element that drew me into this study, I was curious regarding whether it mattered how educators interact with students in our academic programs, beyond simply acting professionally. What I am trying to get at here is, do we need to model CYC practice whilst teaching CYC theory in order to support student to practitioner self-concept shift? In child and youth care we discuss that, “each interaction and/or moment has tremendous potential” (Krueger, 1995, p.Vv) and we recognize “that young people are the authors of their own story ( history) and, ultimately, the agents of their own change” (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2011, as cited in Garfat et al., 2018, p.11 ). Additionally, Stuart (2009) identifies that child and youth care practitioners care for and about young people and families while working with them in their own milieu. As I travelled across Canada in dialogue with colleagues, students and graduates I was curious about what might be similar and different about the process of teaching CYC in a classroom and how that relates to experiences related to their self concept shift. In my teaching practice I had started to move along in my development, and I believe I was moving into stage two of Phalen’s professional development model,

#### Level two

The practitioner focuses on supporting clients to take control of themselves. Skills related to implementing internal controls applying theory and creative intervention techniques are developed. The practitioner values individualized approaches (as cited in Stuart 2013. P 53).

Additionally, I believe I was also shifting in Garfat’s transformational model where I believe I was moving into stage 3,

Characterized by a facilitative role the work involves the youth in decisions about interventions, personal goals, and future outcomes. Boundaries between the workers and the youth exist with greater clarity (as cited in Stuart 2013, p. 55).



### **3.5.1. Reframing education milieu**

The educator strengthens their CYC practice orientation into their new educator role, deeply considering a growth and developmental mindset to their pedagogical practice. They intentionally bring a CYC practice orientation towards pedagogy that brings familiarity and a sense of security. As a result, the relationship between student and educator begins to resemble formats seen in other CYC relational care experiences. Emerging into the educator's pedagogical practice are elements of flexibility and shared decision making related to meeting the course outcomes. Delivery of curriculum shifts from student centred and transactional towards relational, curriculum centred and transformational allowing for the role of learner and educator to be transferred between members of the entire classroom community.

### **3.6. Theme 6 – Post traumatic growth - Leaning into suffering**

In the next theme I will be exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic and my partners journey through cancer whilst living with anxiety has impacted my CYC pedagogical "*Praxis, which, for those unfamiliar with the concept, can be thought of as the ethical synthesis of knowing, doing and being in practice*" (Steckley, 2020a. p. 1). In Child and Youth Care practice we believe that the professional self and the personal self are woven together aspects of practitioners. In a simple form we do not believe you can compartmentalize your work self and the personal self. Early in the CYC discipline, as noted previously, the focus of our work was being with young people in the daily activities of living life, this way of working was explored in a foundational book called "*The other 23 hours*"(Trieschman et al., 2002). As a result of this "living with" those we serve, our formalized education requires us to build curriculum, professional standards, ethics, and competencies that recognize that we do not have a professional and personal separation as other disciplines. One of the core competencies that we explore, organize, and refine is our "self-concept" through our unique discipline's CYC "Praxis"(Bellefeuille et al., 2017; Kouri, 2015; White, 2007, 2015, 2019) or the "Being," "Knowing," & "Doing" of CYC practice. Today, we have grown beyond just the residential milieu to now be present in an ever-growing list of milieu's; however, we still hold a foundational competency, reflective Praxis (Mattingly et al, 2010). In most of the courses in our degree we build into assignments, classwork, and evaluation processes

“Praxis” experiences so that students can explore and then integrate the theories, concepts, and facts into their life as a way of “being.” Once students integrate Praxis into their way of “being” they can no longer “do” their life the same way, they have transformed and passed through a threshold learning experience. Steckley (2020a, 2020b) identifies that “Threshold concepts are core concepts in a given discipline which, amongst other things, tend to be troublesome for educators and students, but also transformative once grasped” (p. 1). Later I will explain the troublesome process of Praxis. Another focused time for students to develop their Praxis is during field placements. I accomplish this in three ways: 1) students complete 12 written Praxis reflections based on experiences they chose from their field placement; 2) I invite each student to at least two in person meetings of approximately an hour each where we unpack a learning event so I can show the critical thinking used to complete an effective Praxis process; 3) during the seminar attached to field placement, students utilize Praxis co-visioning, here they take each other through an unpacking of the Praxis so they can deepen their Praxis skill. As stated earlier I believe that the post-secondary classroom is just another milieu of CYC practice, so, I am required to do “Praxis” in my pedagogy. This next section will be a written “Praxis” reflection on the impact of COVID-19 and my family’s journey through cancer on my practice.

The “being” in CYC Praxis refers to two aspects of reflection. The first part of reflection asks the practitioner to explore and identify their feelings as they consider an experience of focus, a learning event – this can be a specific situation or a theme from a collection of situations. The second aspect of the being element of “Praxis” is considering your alignment to the CYC competencies (Mattingly et al, 2010), 25 Characteristics of a relational approach to CYC (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018), and codes of ethics. It is important for me to note that others in the field may do this a little differently than I do; however, our disciplinary intention is the same to explore yourself in relation to an experience. When I introduce “being” to students I explain that we explore feelings first because feelings do not lie; however, your interpretation of your feelings might. It takes the entire time of the degree for students to unlearn and relearn how to recognize, label, and interpret their feelings. Students often begin Praxis work feeling uncomfortable and confused about exploring their feelings intentionally. It takes so much time and effort and is uncomfortable for students at first because they need to unlearn how feelings are often influenced by the intersectionality of our life. Most often

people grow up being taught how to understand and express feelings based on many elements of intersectionality such as gender, culture, race, social location, etc. They learn to mask, cover up, or embellish feelings. We also learn in our culture which feelings are acceptable and unacceptable; therefore, we learn to think first and filter or deny our feelings. A potential example of this could be when something happens to a man who is sad or disappointed in Canadian culture. If this man were to feel these feelings and these led to tears, many people might offer feedback such as, be strong, be a man, don't cry. Now, if that same man were to be angry and shout and perhaps even be aggressive, it might then be seen as acceptable, maybe, even expected that these behaviours should occur when a man is upset. These gender rules of emotional expression extend from our culture, age, etc. again the intersectionality of the person we are. So, we are trained in our specific culture and society how to represent our emotional self. When you add the layer of "being a professional" we have another layer of that intersectionality – professional culture. Here we can have even more expectations around what is acceptable and not acceptable. It all depends on how your discipline acculturates you regarding how feelings are processed. So, in CYC practice we acculturate people into an experience where we want them to locate those initial feelings and be genuine and truthful about what they are so they can explore the meaning of them to "self" as "practice(ioner)."

Once CYC students locate their feelings and label them (we often use a feelings wheel to provide students with a larger feeling vocabulary) they are asked to explore what is driving their feelings. It could be that the feelings come out of unmet or met needs; personal trauma; family culture, social culture, experiences, etc. Often students struggle to reflect how their feelings are about something that is to do with them rather than feelings being linked to a behaviour or situation of someone else. When people locate their feelings in another person there is a danger that to change the feelings, they try to change the other. This can turn relationships into places of power and control, as we seek to change the feeling. If however we locate the feeling inside of us, then we can use this as a way of self discovery. Finally, a key reason that we want practitioners to locate the feeling inside of self rather than in the "other" is because if you see that the other is making you (fill in the emotion) and you wish the feeling to go you might decide to change your emotional or physical proximity to them. This distancing is often a place of hurt and shame that many of the young people and their

families have experienced previously. You can probably see how dangerous that would be if you needed to care for a young person that was behaving inappropriately, and you distance yourself from them rather than pull them closer. If you distance yourself from them then they might believe that they are a bad person and have no ability to change, rather than the behaviour being inappropriate and something that they can shift.

When we start this process with students, we invite them to dig into the feeling, especially uncomfortable ones. Then identify the feelings, label them, and sit with them so as to recognize where they come from and how they are linked to their beliefs, values, and ethics. Over time, through conversation and support, students begin to be able to understand that sometimes feelings that they are experiencing are due to the way they have been treated growing up, related to their own trauma or other aspects of how they came to be who they are. Once the students accomplish this it is amazing how self-accepting they become. Additionally, they realize that “hurt people do hurting behaviour” and that if we “love” (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018, p. 18) the humans we serve, then they can see themselves as worthy of being loved and cared for. Once they truly get Praxis they are transformed as they realize that they are responsible for navigating their feelings to determine if something that they have experienced interferes with their capacity to be in relationship with another person. Another way to look at that ability that CYC practitioners have is to practice from a place of meeting the human they are supporting where they are at rather than where they want them to be. Next, I will be exploring my “being” related to my families emotional journey through cancer, whilst living with anxiety through the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before I begin to unpack this experience, I want to share with the reader some important details. One of the readers of my thesis invited me to consider whether the information below was in fact data – a report on Stephanie. This was an extremely important question for me to consider. I went back to Stephanie and Lexi to revisit the discussion of what to include in my thesis for a third time. What emerged for us as we considered the question was that the story below is our relational “knowing” of the experience rather than a report of facts on one of us. The process of revisiting the journey has become easier each time and now even offers times of laughter. In many ways this relational based self-study process has been very cathartic and grounding. The next section includes many touchstone moments, I present those moments to bring the reader into contact with the struggle and sense making I was experiencing. To

provide a connection to the struggle in order to bring the reader into contact with the COVID-19, cancer, and anxiety struggles that our family and therefore my teaching practice were connected to – a context for the reader. Finally, my family and I discussed whether it was appropriate to name my family members in this work, the answer was yes. We concluded that it was important to personalize this aspect of the autobiography and keep you connected to the people and treat them like people by providing the names. We felt that to not name them was in fact to treat my family like data – depersonalizing. Perhaps some of the readers of this document might argue with my rationale, that is valid. For us as a family this was something we chose to continue with. I now share our story of cancer, COVID-19, and anxiety

Stephanie, my partner, and I were doing what we do each morning, having coffee, watching the morning news, and chatting about what our day was going to be like. As we watched the news, we heard the first reports of a new disease called COVID-19. Stephanie let me know that she was going to her doctor because she had been experiencing a sore throat for a few weeks. Her doctor referred her to a ears, nose, and throat specialist and a few weeks later we were in the beginning of transmission limiting measures for COVID-19, so she could not attend the specialist appointment in person. The specialist called her, and she had to use her phone to take a picture of her throat area. After viewing the picture, he felt that a course of antibiotics would be best. Over the next few weeks, the swelling in Stephanie’s throat became quickly worse and it started to interfere with eating, swallowing, and speech. The next appointment with the specialist occurred in person and they took a biopsy. COVID-19 was spreading around the world, we were now in lock down and I was teaching online and learning many new programs and platforms to deliver courses. Two days later we were called into an appointment, I had prior responsibilities, so Lexi took Stephanie to the appointment. When they returned with eyes red from crying, they let me know that it was CANCER. The word CANCER lands on you like few others. The word has you recognize your frailty and vulnerability, one that can end relationships. I remember my mind experiencing fear, confusion, and worry – a reasonable response; however, I recognized that these feelings were over taking me and became ever present. I believe I quickly moved into an anxiety response where my ability to think rationally was hijack by my need to try to control “the situation” now I was experiencing an “unreasonable or excessive emotional reaction to current or future perceived threat ( Evans et al, 2005 in

Gural & Mackay-Chiddenton, 2016). As this was occurring I was also recognizing that my physical, cognitive and behavioural presentation (Gural & Mackay-Chiddenton, 2016, p.227) were beginning to spiral and I was challenged to manage my life and responsibilities. Additionally, when intense, repetitive, or long-term anxiety/fear experiences occur for humans it has the potential to move from an anxiety response to a trauma experience, as we now know trauma experiences are personal and can impact brain structure and functioning (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). In an anxiety or trauma response your emotions become narrowed, dampened, intensified, or removed. Your mind shifts from rational and reasoned thought to reaction, irrational and protection-based actions that are in the primary part of your brain, the brainstem (Martin et al., 2009, p.2). Additionally, the biology of survival kicks in, your body becomes flooded with adrenalin and cortisol, increasing your heart rate, moving to rapid shallow breathing and focusing blood flow on your vital organs and reducing blood flow to your extremities, sometimes creating tingling or numbing feelings(Martin et al., 2009. p. 7). Our body reacts this way towards fear and worry because it is preparing to defend our existence in relation to the perceived threat, in this case cancer. Many of us may recognized this as the freeze, fight, or flight mode of survival (Gural & Mackay-Chiddenton, 2016, p.226). One way people will describe this process refers to feeling like they have been punched in the stomach, what is really happening is that your body is shutting down this non-vital area. What is interesting is that as I write this today, I feel that feeling again, I am reconnecting to the trauma response I had when Stephanie told me she had cancer. I have worked in a field where you hear difficult and challenging stories. I have had children disclose all forms of abuse. I have experienced teenagers tell me in detail about their violent crimes. I have heard stories of interpersonal violence and rape. I have heard many hard human stories, both those of committing terrible behaviour and those receiving terrible behaviour. To thrive in the CYC field you learn to see the human who is telling the story and be with people in an authentic, honest, and caring way. This was so different. I was so confused and angry. I was angry because I was so hurt and scared by the CANCER. I worked hard to process the feelings but in all honesty I could not. So, I had to avoid them or distract myself from them. There were moments when I could be with them, but the experience would quickly overtake me. In CYC practice, Praxis and self-care are utilized to help us as practitioners navigate complex experiences and emotions, so that we can be present and in relationship with others. When I started to contain my experiences, feelings, and emotions I did not only contain

the specific emotions or experiences, connected to Stephanie and cancer, humans can't really work that way. What I started to contain was how it felt to be with those kinds of emotions. This led to me containing any emotions that resembled the forms of emotions I was experiencing with Cancer and COVID-19 with everyone around me from students to Stephanie. So instead of being with students and walking beside them, meaning making and examining the context of their experience (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018, p.13) as they navigated COVID-19 and the upheaval in their academic experience or life challenges; rather, I was creating emotional distancing with students or sometimes overly connecting with their experiences, what is sometimes labelled as countertransference. My emotions were being influenced by the student's connection or needs from me. Another way to explain this is moody and unpredictable. Students' experiences were starting to annoy, frustrate and anger me; however, students were navigating changes in work, school, and life and because of COVID-19, they too were feeling overwhelmed and challenged. There were times when I avoided, delayed, or denied my professional responsibility to provide student support and understanding. I recognize that compassion and understanding for others starts with self-compassion and understanding for self, I was in a unique, difficult and challenging life experience; however, I also want to offer that in CYC practice we are required to have " a deep and active self-awareness that the practitioner can be reassured that their actions are in the interest of the other(s) and not simply the CYC practitioner meeting their own needs" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018, p.30).

Life became quickly complex, pressured, and overwhelming after the diagnosis. Within a week we were in an oncologist appointment at BC Cancer in the Abbotsford Hospital. I remember driving to the appointment and being completely silent all the way there. The cancer was growing into Stephanie's throat, cheek, and neck, interfering with her airway, speech, and ability to consume nutrients and water. Stephanie was also naturally becoming anxious and likely traumatized by what was happening to her during the pandemic and the consistent messages about avoiding contact with strangers; however, we were attending daily appointments at the hospital for treatments and care. Anxiety tends to have a person look at the worst case scenario and as a result stop people from doing life activities. In this case anxiety informed Stephanie to not do the suggested chemotherapy but she agreed to 35 radiation treatment sessions. Stephanie understood that a potential side effect of chemotherapy could be vomiting. Stephanie's

anxiety shows up in just normal everyday life with an absolute fear of throwing up, which can lead to a panic attack. The anxiety tells Stephanie that if she throws up, she could aspirate the vomit and choke to death. This was an example of one of Stephanie's anxiety based irrational thoughts. In our family what we have learned to do as a family team is to come beside her so we can co-regulate with her. Next, as a support person to Stephanie, I generally encourage her to examine her thoughts and perceptions of the situation to consider what is real and what is potentially unreal with regards to the thinking. Our experience has been that with this form of care, compassion, and with time Stephanie can work through irrational/difficult thoughts. However, in this case Stephanie was experiencing the growth moving further into her jaw, neck, and esophagus making even drinking water difficult, so the fear of choking to death was ever present for Stephanie and us as family members. Along with that experience was the unknown and often bad news associated with COVID-19, a disease that can impact a person's ability to breathe and that can lead to needing to use a ventilator. As stated, before as a partner of Stephanie I have learnt over the years how we can navigate anxiety and my training and her training in CYC practice has helped us with this. We did use our CYC skills in this experience and faired surprisingly well early in the journey. In my pedagogy I was also initially doing well, I think. My student evaluations seemed to suggest that for the most part I was present and attentive; however, a couple of student responses seemed to identify that I was a little impulsive and curt "Instructor made several opinionated comments on mental health matters such as he "wasn't sure bipolar disorder was real" and constantly bashed the use of medications for mental health (student assessment)." There could be a little of the students' perception going on here; however, I also recognize that when I am fearful and irritated, I do tend to be snappy and curt. I did share some reservations I had in regard to bipolar disorder as I believe it is often misdiagnosed as some of the presentations of bipolar are also similar to complex trauma. I think I was probably doing so in an intense and annoyed way which tends to look aggressive and or arrogant. I just was so tired of negotiating with cancer and anxiety as it lived in our family that I found myself sometimes in the middle of presenting ideas and dealing with questions from the place of fear, frustration, and fatigue that I was feeling.

Another challenge that Stephanie had to face, and I needed to support her with was how they provide radiation treatment. The radiation needs to be place exactly



where the tumor is so that it basically kills it. To do this the patient has to be immobilized. This is accomplished by having the person pinned down to the treatment table. This hit another of Stephanie's anxiety areas – feeling trapped and unable to escape to safety. I bring you into the complexity of the first few weeks of navigating treatment as it helps illuminate the feelings I was experiencing. I was so annoyed and angry with Stephanie. She was making decisions that made sense to her; however, they were also taking her away from identified treatment processes. This led me to my own irrational thoughts about losing my partner. As this was occurring, I was needing to be open, compassionate, and able to be flexible with the students who were experiencing COVID-19 and the impact to their life and learning. There were many days I avoided speaking and connecting with students because I could not hear their challenges; it seemed like whining and complaining. Not the place I am used to going with people that are experiencing challenges. I also know that I would be a little curt with them and that probably made them feel that I was unsafe for them to connect with.

The next stage of the journey was one of the most difficult. Stephanie had received seven treatments of radiation. For these first visits we did a great deal of thought preparation at home for Stephanie to leave the house and attend the appointments. On the way there we would sometimes talk but often Stephanie need to just focus on getting to and through the treatment. It was such a powerfully surreal time; it was like living inside a dream/nightmare. One evening Stephanie let me know that she was feeling quite hot and could we check her temperature. When we did, she had a temperature of 101. Next, we negotiated for a couple of hours for her to attend the emergency room. We were really negotiating with the anxiety and the fear of becoming infected with COVID-19. We eventually attended; in this case they would not allow me to go into emergency with her. Just before I went to bed, I checked in with Stephanie who had let me know they were keeping her in overnight and that she was managing the worry as best she could. The next morning, I tried to connect with Stephanie and could not get through to her. I had a busy day of meetings and then teaching at night, another 12-hour day. I asked Lexi to connect with Mission hospital to figure out what was going on. Lexi connected with me in between meetings and was concerned. Stephanie had been transferred to Abbotsford and Lexi was trying to connect with her. I had to do my day and leave it to Lexi to manage. Lexi was able to get the cancer treatment team to connect with the emergency department in Abbotsford to note on

their file that either Lexi or I could support Stephanie who at this point needed us to help her communicate and to help manage the anxiety. Between Lexi and I we were with Steph in emergency for six days and five nights as they waited for an oncology bed. During this time Stephanie's temperature got to 104 degrees and they were asking us about the interventions they could do if she needed life saving intervention. They also told us they did not understand why the temperature was not going down and that it was getting critical so be prepared to deal with issues around death and dying. So, once again I needed to stuff my emotions and try to manage. I was still teaching my full load of classes and often going through the motions, like a zombie. Due to all the stress and fear I was experiencing I was emotionally and mentally shutting down and made many mistakes. It is good that we are in CYC because I was able to share with my students to inform them on what was happening for me by letting them know the basic details. Also, I had been reaching out to my faculty team so I could let them know how I was doing. This was also an opportunity to let them know that they could talk with other faculty should they be worried about me or feel that I was not providing them with what they needed. It did feel great to have the ability to be authentic and to experience students and faculty working together to get the learning done.

Stephanie, Lexi and I have discussed the time that Stephanie was in Abbotsford emergency. It was fascinating to hear how each of us experienced this. Lexi and I were pretty much on the same page. What was interesting was Stephanie thought she was only there overnight and that her anxiety was not that bad at the time. When we had the discussion Stephanie was completely surprised by what happened. I understand this as her trauma response to the situation. Partly she was very sick but also basically, her brain took a vacation because the anxiety, stress, and fear were so strong it was the only way she could survive. At the time I had no idea this is what was happening to Stephanie since in many ways I was experiencing Stephanie outside of the medical issues as I would normally when she is sick, stressed, and facing a significant challenge. This has taught me so much about what survival looks like for people. As a result of this experience, I have become so much more focused on students' feelings of safety as this basic need allows the brain to function correctly and be as open and available to learning. Many people around me report that I have become softer and less intense. I have always been a passionate person and feel that what I have done is shifted my passion from passion for the field to passion for the person. In many ways I

have aligned my pedagogy with the way I approached the work with the humans I served in practice. I also have shifted to instead of seeing myself as a gate keeper for the field to recognizing that there is a place for everyone and that my work is to walk beside students as they figure this out. It is a subtle yet important shift in my pedagogy.

Stephanie was in the hospital for close to two weeks. When she left, she could not speak, had a feeding tube and was close to a third of the way through her radiation treatments. She had also lost close to a third of her body weight. We were heading into summer semester and COVID-19 restrictions were continuing. We were attending daily radiation treatments. I was supposed to teach summer practicum, but the university denied the ability for our students to attend placement sites, so we cancelled the class – what a relief. We shifted my workload to planning and organizing for fall and winter semester practicum placements. I was doing a little better mentally and emotionally as there was some routine and predictability within COVID-19 procedures and the cancer treatment. Stephanie was also doing better for the same reasons. That said, I feel that during the rest of the summer semester I was mostly numb to life.

On September 25th, 2020, Stephanie had her final radiation treatment, and we were back to the second wave of COVID-19. I was teaching online, and Stephanie was dealing with fatigue and needing some help to manage at home. At this time, she continued to not be able to speak and was receiving her nutrition through a G-tube. It seemed that in the fall 2020 semester both faculty and students were getting used to the shift to online learning. I do not recall this time well as I think I was also in recovery. In the spring of 2021, I continued to teach online, and we were in the third wave of COVID-19. Our whole family, including my 85-year-old father who lived with us all received our first COVID-19 immunization, and this was a relief. I continued to feel fatigued and feeling like I was surviving. In April we had to decide whether we were going to return to teaching in the classroom in fall 2021. I chose to continue with online. In summer semester of 2021, I was teaching practicum online and we continued to adjust so that students could complete their practicum hours and assignments. Stephanie was getting stronger and able to look after her needs. Stephanie was also beginning to be able to speak a little but became tired quickly. We had a little challenge in early summer of 2021 when Stephanie was experiencing a time of depression. She wondered if she would ever be able to speak normally again and really wondered if she would ever have the G-tube removed. This was once again a very difficult time. Lexi

was in Calgary completing a nursing program, which also may have contributed to the way Stephanie was feeling; Lexi and Stephanie are like best friends. I was very concerned for her as it was very evident that she was sad and depressed; however, she was not open to dialogue. This experience once again impacted my teaching as I felt like I was walking on eggshells and had concerns about Stephanie's mental health. We had a few relational conflicts that are unusual for us. Stephanie was so angry that she was thinking that I was the problem and that she just needed to leave me. This hurt me a great deal and I almost went on stress leave from work. I let her know that I did not agree with her perspective of our situation but would support her decision. We made a plan where basically we were two separate people in the house and limited our interaction. Stephanie needed some space and time to think through her situation. After three weeks we had a day long conversation where she recognized that she was depressed, and we developed a plan to work on her mental health. My teaching practice suffered, and I was just getting by again.

As we entered fall 2021 I continued to teach online and Stephanie was speaking more. In September Stephanie made a slow return to work, working from home. Most of the work she did was administrative, which allowed her to continue to slowly increase her ability to speak as she rarely needed to talk with other staff. At this time, we were dealing with a new normal and life had a pace and process. I returned to working on my thesis even though I continued to feel complete fatigued and just felt like I needed a long vacation on a sunny beach. That said, I was back to a slight more balanced person and therefore a slightly more balanced educator.

In the next chapter I will be concluding the work by identifying the main themes in my self-study. I will also be trying to suggest what benefits for the field might be drawn-out of this work. Finally, I would like to clearly show a link between the learning I have done and the way it currently impacts my practice and what I feel might occur in the future.

## Chapter 4. Conclusion and inspirations

In this chapter I bring this self study to a conclusion. What follows here will close this work and meet the intention of self study as identified by Loughran and Northfield (1998) "...self-study might be viewed, understood, and practiced so that the outcomes may be communicated to others and thereby lead to learning that is useful and applicable for more than just the individuals directly involved" (p. 13). As you read this final chapter it is the weaving together of the co-operative inquiry themes, Chapter 2, and the autobiographical self study themes, Chapter 3. This is a rendering of the combination of the themes to focus on what I consider to be important outcomes for me today and with some suggestions for the field. I believe that the themes in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 will continue to percolate into my emerging CYC pedagogical practice.

### 4.1. From the ground up - the EdD in Practice

As I complete the formal journey in my learning, I sort friends and colleagues' sage advice. One of my colleagues was completing her EdD in Educational Leadership at Simon Fraser University (SFU). I went to the SFU Education website and read the Educational Leadership description, it was interesting, but it was not for me. I drifted through other EdD program opportunities where I found the Educational Practice EdD, with the following overview:

This unique and innovative Doctor of Education (EdD) program is designed to support educators in the scholarly study of their own professional practice. Through cycles of inquiry, including critical reflection, community engagement, and responsive and ethical action, practitioners will theorize their own practice, contribute to professional dialogue, and cultivate change. (*Overview - Faculty of Education - Simon Fraser University*, n.d.).

I realized this was for me as it sounded like the Praxis focus, we have in Child and Youth Care (CYC) and I felt this was a perfect program for me to conclude my formal learning journey. This program would allow me to spend time digging into and understand "who I think I am" as a CYC educator so that I could know "thymself" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018, p.30). The journey I have been on since joining the EdD in Educational Practice program has unfolded in the account presented in preceding pages. The time

has come for reflection, and making meaning, of the learning landscape I have travelled. I will also present some of the personal calls to action that have emerged from my experiences that have unfolded over the last four years. I finish with some thoughts and practical ideas I have for the field and future research.

## **4.2. The process of inquiry**

As identified in Chapter 1, the focus of this work has been deeply personal as I explored my experience of conducting a co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996) across Canada and reflected on the impact of COVID-19, my partner's journey through cancer whilst living with anxiety, my new role as a full-time faculty, and as I complete this work the death of my dad who was also my very good friend. These aspects of my life journey have been unearthed with an intention to explore and understand these experiences through Praxis (White, 2007, 2015) and autobiographical self study, to understand at this moment, my CYC educator self-concept along with my pedagogy implications.

As I navigated the past four years, it was important for me to triangulate some of my learning to various CYC core documents: Child and Youth Care Certification Board Competencies (Mattingly et al, 2010), BC Education Consortium Competencies (Rammage et al, 2018), and The Characteristic of a Relational CYC Approach Revisited (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018). The triangulation process was meant to illuminate how, for me, teaching in the post-secondary class is doing CYC practice in the post-secondary milieu (Stuart, 2013. p.87). Additionally, in completing this process I have been able to recognize the importance of continuing to use a Praxis approach to developing my CYC pedagogy so that I may take responsibility for recognizing, and if needed, adjusting the elements in the classroom milieu to ensure a safe and caring learning environment to enhance the opportunity for students to shift their self-concept from " I am just a student" to "I am a CYC practitioner."

Due to the personal life challenges I experienced and the COVID-19 pandemic this work needed to include how life outside of the classroom connected to the educator, learner, and the curriculum inside the classroom. In other words, how is the educator "performed" (Fels, 2015, p.151) by the milieu, relationships, and ecological elements that surround and weave themselves into the learning space?

Dr. Fels, in one of the courses of the EdD, asked us to consider the following question: “How does your environment *perform you?*” Fels (2015) clarifies that performative inquiry invites the researcher, educator, and human to explore,

What questions catch us unaware, like a tug on the sleeve, when we are looking in another direction? How do we truly attend to the possible worlds unfolding within those performative moments that interrupt, disrupt, and if we are attentive, encourage us to reimagine our engagement as educators, as researchers, as learners in the presence of our students? (p. 51).

This performative framing of experience appealed to me as it appears to invite the person to be an “intentional reflective practitioner” noticing moments, experiences, and invitations to your place in the world, relationships, and your life processes. As noted earlier the performative framework transformed into the autobiographical self study method so I could contain the learning from the adapted co-operative inquiry and arts-based ethnography along with the life experiences. In completing the adaptations to the methods to deal with real life experiences I believe I have maintained the honesty and trustworthiness of the investigation. For me, since what I noticed is personal, autobiographical self study allows for the following ideas from Parker Palmer (1997),

The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject (p.14).

To live in a reflective stance as a practitioner takes a great deal of work and humility, individually and relationally with others. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) suggest that,

Humility is the willingness to admit that one’s knowledge and experience are limited and incomplete and to act accordingly. It means acknowledging that others in the group have ideas to express that might teach us something new or change our mind about something significant. It is being willing to see all others in the group as potential teachers. (Loc 706).

Palmer (2007) also offers guidance to those who wish to be relational and engage students in the classroom with equality and authenticity by explaining that

Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a “capacity for connectedness.” They are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves (p.3).

Finally, I wish to connect to some important ideas regarding an “ethic of care” by Noddings (2012),

In care ethics, relation is ontologically basic, and the caring relation is ethically (morally) basic. Every human life starts in relation, and it is through relations that a human individual emerges (p3).

This would suggest that if we are teaching about care we need to locate ourselves with an “ethic of care” so that we can perform caring while teaching it.

### **4.3. Congruency**

I explored how my beliefs, values, and ethics regarding my practice align with the competencies, and ethics of the CYC discipline. Additionally, I have made the case that CYC educational practice shares pedagogical features with other disciplines, and that CYC practice in the classroom affords the same approach as other CYC practice milieus.

As a result of this work, I realize that living a Praxis approach to walking with students into curiosity about curriculum, effectively requires CYC practitioners to *know themselves*. This is stated in the 25 Characteristics of relational CYC practice, “It’s all about us,”

... ultimately, interactions with other people are profoundly influenced by who CYC practitioners are themselves... It is only through a deep and active self-awareness that the practitioner can be reassured that their actions are in the interest of the other(s) and not simply the CYC practitioner meeting their own needs. (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018 p.30)

The CYC Praxis approach to practice was likely informed by the foundational work of Schön (1983) establishing an epistemology of practice that addresses the uncertain, indeterminate zones of practice that defy technical solution and require a kind of artistry – a capacity to frame and re-frame problems in an emergent and on-going conversation that the *reflective practitioner* has with the practice situation.



In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is the swampy lowland where situations are confusing “messes” incapable of technical solution (Schön, 1983. p. 42).

Through this doctoral program and writing this thesis, I have come to understand that the process of becoming and being a CYC educator is emergent and requires the same kind of artistry in understanding one’s self and identity that Schön has articulated for reflective practice. I realize that I am on the same continuum as my students, that I am still a learner and still becoming – *there is no finish line*. I need to embrace myself as a learner if I hope to connect with my students. One can arrive at the end of the doctoral journey, and yet still be humbled by the messiness of practice. Formal education might come to closure, but the nuances and subtleties and the depth of empathy and care required in the face of CYC education remain. In this sense my learning is only beginning.

In conclusion, the idea that the ability to support student self-concept shift begins with me. This learning is a continued call to action for me to hone my reflective practice towards an ethic of care that is grounded in social justice.

#### **4.4. Reviewing the learning and personal calls to action**

In completing this work, I have arrived on several themes that I have previously shared with the reader. In Chapter 2 I detailed my experience of travelling across the country and sitting with graduates where several themes emerged: Discovery of a community of practice; relational self-care; experiential learning/practicum; space to come into community; keynote call to action regarding congruence of teaching CYC to practicing CYC; and finally, representation. In the previous pages I have detailed these for the reader.

In Chapter 3 I discussed my relationship to the themes in Chapter 2 with the edition of weaving in the impacts of personal life experiences. The macro themes I constructed were: Ethical integration acculturation; do you see me? Storying; relational practice development; pedagogical dancing; and post traumatic growth – leaning into suffering.

In the next section, I will focus on some of the learning that is garnering my attention today as a CYC educator. At this time, I need to revisit an important premise I had in Chapter 1; this is not a definitive work that leads to a conclusion; rather, this work is an end of the beginning (EdD program/research) and a beginning to the end (my practice in the last phase of my career). What I write here is valid for today. Tomorrow it will likely shift due to outside pressures, processes of living and working, and the ever-changing landscape of human existence.

#### **4.5. Themes: 1) Ethical integration acculturation 2) Do you see me?**

In being with recent graduates, hearing them, and choosing collaborative inquiry as my research methodology I have proven an alignment between my practice and CYC characteristics of “connection and engagement”; “intentionality”; “doing with not for or to” (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018, p.13). As well, I suggest that I have been congruent with the CYC competency IV Relationship and Communication; 1- interpersonal communication; b – demonstrate a variety of effective verbal and non-verbal communications skills including; 1d - which states “provide for participation of (students) in the planning, implementation and evaluation of (education) impacting them (Mattingly et al, 2010 p18). Additionally, I have embedded my pedagogy in the I-Professionalism competency as noted:

##### 2- Professional Development and Behavior

###### a. Value orientation

(1) state personal and professional values and their implications for practice including how personal and professional beliefs values and attitudes influence interactions

(2) state a philosophy of practice that provides guiding principles for the design, delivery, and management of services (Mattingly et al, 2010 p11.)

I suggest further that CYC graduates identified to me that what helped them shift their self-concept from student to practitioner requires that faculty design learning experiences with core CYC characteristics in mind. They identified that courses that had curriculum that aligned with the core characteristics of relational CYC practice such

as: “purposeful use of activities” (Garfat & Fulcher, 2018 p 32); “meaning making”(Garfat & Fulcher, 2018. p.27); “examining context”(Garfat & Fulcher, 2018. p.28); It’s all about us”(Garfat & Fulcher, 2018, p30) allowed them to be meaningfully connected to learning in ways that help them connect to the material in deeply provocative ways, enabling them to transform from student to novice practitioner. Finally, to assure that as we continue to welcome new practitioners into the field of practice in a manner that is not about assimilative acculturation where an individual’s unique ways of being disappear, it is fundamental that we remain uncomfortable and recognize that we have a great deal of work to do to consistently view our work and practice through a decolonizing, indigenizing, and Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (IBPOC) lens.

#### **4.5.1. Personal call to action**

I am in a significantly privileged position as a white male, 50+, upper middle-class man who is an assistant professor in a public post-secondary school. Add to this the potential of being viewed as a Doctor of Education, there is a great deal of power I hold, this requires a great deal of responsibility towards all humans, my field, and the students I walk beside as they develop their practitioner self-concept. I must do more work on being an ally that seeks to use my privilege to ensure that the voice of all humans is represented in the classroom milieu. I must continue to work in our community of practice to explore and advocate for CYC core documents that reflect the world of today and are inclusive of all. Then I must take these documents and ensure they are weaved into the curriculum of CYC post-secondary learning.

Currently, I am on the board of the Child and Youth Care Certification Board. As a co-chair on the standards committee, we are renovating the current CYC competencies to assure that current best practice aligns with a focus on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) and Indigenous, black and people of colour (IBPOC) are reflected in the competencies that undergird certification processes. I am also returning to co-chair of the Education Day Committee of the Child and Youth Care Accreditation Board of Canada in September. Along with developing a day focused on CYC education that invites learners and educators as equals I am working with a colleague from Selkirk College to launch a community of practice for CYC educators. This community of practice will among other things provide a monthly meeting for new and

seasoned faculty from across the country to meet to discuss teaching and learning that reflects alignment to the field's competencies, characteristics, and ethics of the field. I am hopeful that from this we may be able to launch a quarterly journal with a specific focus on CYC pedagogy.

Focusing on my local efforts. First, I have been honoured as one of several University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) faculty across the campus, nominated by an Indigenous faculty member, to be an Indigenous ally. Over this year we have been taking several workshops helping us to clarify the ally role. Next, we are working in allyship to increase the decolonizing and indigenizing processes at the UFV campus.

Prior to COVID-19, I had developed, with some graduates of our program, a community of practice for CYC practitioners in the region. When I met with graduates in the community, they had shared that they missed the company of fellow CYC practitioners and the types of classroom conversations we had, they missed having support and learning. We currently have 54 members and prior to COVID-19 would have approximately 20 folks come out to be together to talk about practice and revisit theory. We tried to have the group meet on Zoom over the past two years; however, it did not work. As I complete the EdD work I will be starting it up again in September.

I am working with my home community of Mission to build a strong partnership with human service agencies, UFV students, and faculty to develop a "collaboratory," a place to foster synergetic learning. One aspect of this has been my involvement with several students in working with the community on a new five-year child and youth strategic plan. This plan is grounded in a CYC approach to growing caring and competent young people, with a focus on balancing prevention with intervention, and an applied developmental approach to managing silo funding streams.

#### **4.6. Post traumatic growth – leaning into suffering**

It was difficult to revisit and explore the personal experiences that I covered in Chapter 3. However, it was a needed process if I intend to be a Praxis informed practitioner. I think the biggest learning for me during this time was the fact that what happens outside the classroom impacts what happens inside the classroom. I have noted that during some of the more challenging times I intentionally avoided

connecting to students as I felt untrustworthy. I felt that I could not hold an ethic of care for others as I was struggling to live an ethic of care in my own life. In my previous 30 years of practice, I dealt with many difficult, complex, and emotionally driven challenges, and did well. However, when the experiences identified in Chapter 3 hit me, I could not manage, but did not want to accept that. I was moody, disconnected and often irritable. I did reach out to my colleagues and the students to inform them of my situation, but I could have done more, I was not able to practice an ethic of care with self and others. In hindsight, I should have taken some personal time and asked for more help. That learning has been useful to me as I went through the recent death of my dad who lived with us for the past eight years and became a good friend to me. This time when I hid from everyone, I took two weeks off to process the experience. I asked for help from colleagues and let go of most of the teaching expectations over those two weeks. There are many differences between going through cancer treatment during a pandemic, that said, I feel like I am more honest with myself and others and as a result did better attending to the processes, emotions, and experience of my dad's death. I will add one note here, I still feel a tremendous level of emotional fatigue from the past few years of challenges that required my attention.

Finally, as I consider the impact of life outside of the classroom to inside the classroom, I can report that people have said to me that they experience me as softer and less intense. They also say that I seem to be more understanding about other people's challenges and seek flexibility and connection to help them. I also think that I have become more aware of student challenges and seek to support them to find their place in the CYC field of practice.

#### **4.6.1. Personal call to action**

As a result of the learning in this theme I recognize I need to focus on my self care and self-compassion. Over the past decade I feel I have focused on developing my professional self at a cost of my personal self. The first aspect of personal care I have done is reconnect to my relationship with nature. We have a new yellow lab in our family. Tonka requires daily walks. We walk 6-10 kms a day in all weather, this has been a wonderful gift to me. When I am outside in the natural world, I feel so much better.

I have shifted my private counselling practice to a nature-based and canine based focus. I have been able to have Tonka join with me as a care partner in my private practice and in the classroom. It has been so wonderful to see how Tonka connects to the young people I serve in practice and the students in our program. I am working with Tonka as a co-therapist and co-teacher, and it brings me a great deal of joy.

Finally, I look forward to completing the EdD and having more time for the gardener I am and to reignite the backpacker I was. I have grand plans of being in nature a great deal more often and (re)creating myself regularly. To once again have the land be my teacher and embrace my connection to the whole world around me.

#### **4.7. Areas for further research**

The work exploring student experience of a CYC education is important to continue and to deepen and widen it. The numbers of students I connected with allows for some opportunities to reflect on a few student experiences; however, it is important to recognize that this is a very small number and should not represent a 'student voice'. Much more research into student experience is required to improve the field of CYC pedagogical practice.

Another area to consider for further research is to recognize and respond to potential weakness in this work. We need to revisit and recognize my place of privilege and that this maintains the dominant cultural dialogue, white men. Additionally, due to my place of privilege I may have inadvertently denied the voice of those who may not have felt safe to explore learning with me. Additionally, the questions and processes I chose were steeped in my social, cultural, and economic location and so are narrow in nature. As an extension of my previous note regarding student voice into this research process. I believe we need to consider how the research may have been different when that research is developed and implemented by female and male educators from various communities such as Indigenous persons, persons of colour, LGBTQ+ persons, diverse abilities persons, and other persons that may not identify with any of the previous categories.

Finally, there is a great opportunity as we resurface from COVID-19 to explore how educators have personally navigated the experience and how it has impacted their well-being and their ability to be present for students.

## **4.8. In closing**

First, thank you for reading this work. I have felt and shared with you many emotions connected to the process of completing an EdD in practice and this research. I started this work identifying that I have always struggled with feeling inside or outside of many aspects of my life. At the completion of this process where I may join the highest levels of the academy, I feel caught between wanting this level of status and not wanting this level of status. Partly this is due to my concern that I may forget how to not be at this level of status, how to be not an academic. Additionally, I fear how others will expect me to be. I have a responsible and self-reflective road to travel, and I am pretty sure that students and my colleagues will hold me accountable to being humble and open.

This journey has brought me to the time in my life where, for the first time, I am considering this to be the last phase of my practice. As I look forward, I have assigned myself some important work, I wish to have CYC practice as a registered profession in the province of British Columbia. This will require a great deal more collaboration and research with colleagues around the world. I am already starting that work.

I have truly appreciated all the relationships that have developed as I have completed the EdD and feel there are friendships and collegial relationships that will be there for the rest of my life. I am truly lucky to be an educator in the undergrad program I graduated in and work with such amazing colleagues. The best part of all of this, as a member of the classroom I get to explore and experience CYC practice in new ways, shared ways, and I get to have many more years in this way to learn and grow as a person, practitioner, and educator.

## Addendum

These words are landing on this page post oral defense. What I offer here is reflection, specific to my CYC educator identity, stimulated by the dialogue with my thesis committee and attendees.

As you would have noted at the beginning of this work one aspect of the process of oral defense was the examining and highlighting of white supremacy and privilege. I am on a personal journey of discovery regarding how I live with humbleness in this world. This work of unpacking whiteness and privilege is ongoing, often uncomfortable, illuminating, and required. As noted in the body of the work, myself, my teaching colleagues and my institution is continuing to work with intention to resolve the many challenges that are present as we navigate towards true inclusiveness and equality in the post-secondary milieu. That said, the words that were spoken by the 3 black Canadian female graduates in Ontario needs to be continuously recognized and lifted up into our professional conversation, “where are those teaching in CYC programs that are non-white” (Ontario thematic writing) - men and predominantly female educators (my voice). Additionally, what space and opportunities are we actively making for LGBTQIA2S humans to engage with current faculty and be mentored into the university milieu. I resolve to continue to explore and unpack my positionality whilst seeking every opportunity to reach out to those students in our program who are not like me, to engage them, encourage them, and to remove barriers they might experience in becoming a CYC educator. I come away from this thesis with a deeper understanding and appreciation of humility, reciprocity, and the selflessness required for effect practice and education in CYC.



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