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## An Arts-Based CYC Practice Self-Portrait Learning Assessment: A Visual Journey of Self-Investigation, Self-Projection and Identification

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### ABSTRACT

Following a brief examination on how the concept of personhood (the self) is understood between Western and non-Western cultures and how these contrasting version of the self has historically governed how educators teach and students learn, this article reports on an arts-based child and youth care (CYC) practice self-portrait assignment used to assess student learning for a third-year undergraduate advance practice course that has as its focus the integration of theory, self, and ethical practice. The arts-based CYC practice self-portrait assessment was established as a way to provide a creative context for students to critically self-reflect on and to visually illustrate their journey of becoming a relational-centered CYC practitioner. It allows students to create narratives to share with others that are at once unique, multifaceted, provocative, and illuminating, revealing their emotions, personality, and ethics within wider cultural aspects of their being. The assignment empowers students to own their own ideas, develop their own voices and to listen to the ideas of others and gives students an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate each other's diversity and uniqueness.

**Key Words:** *Arts-Based Education, Child and Youth Care, Learning Assessment, Relational Ontology*

### INTRODUCTION

Suppose imagination is more important than knowledge, as Einstein believed. In that case, it is of value to reflect on how educational institutions have evolved to be devoid of it, and, even more importantly, how the people who teach and learn within those institutions have been denied a whole human experience. To begin, acknowledgement and exploration of the fundamental differences between Western and non-Western cultures in how knowledge is constructed, what constitutes effective teaching, and what we take as evidence that deep learning has occurred is helpful. One such distinction relates to how the concept of personhood—which, from this point on, will be referred to as the *self*—is understood. History of these different positions can be derived from the Markus and Kitayama [1] research on the cross-culture comparison of self-construal, essentially how people understand themselves in relation to others. Markus and Kitayama found that non-Western cultures tend to be collectivist in character and maintain a view of the *self* as interdependent, relational in nature, and inseparable from social context. By contrast, Western cultures are largely individualistic in nature and hold a view of self-interested, autonomous beings, detached from the external world. It is therefore not unexpected that the dominant pedagogical paradigm of education in Western cultures is ontological individualism, or “ontological realism.”

### THE ONTOLOGICAL INDEPENDENT SELF

In simple terms, ontological individualism asserts that the world and reality exist independently of the observer and their interpretations [2]. It is the belief that the world is comprised of objective facts or truths which allow all human beings to experience a common reality [3,4,5]. It also holds the view of people aka the *self*, “as independent, self-interested, disembodied, and ego-based” [6]. Although the first stirrings of Western individualism are traceable to the pre-Socratic philosophers and the early Christian doctrines [7,8], it is French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist Rene Descartes who is considered the protagonist of ontological individualism [9]. In his *Meditations* (1641), Descartes argues that the natures of mind and body are completely different from one another and that each could exist by itself. He believed that it was only through rational thought that one could arrive at the truth and regarded the perceptions of the senses as questionable [10]. For Descartes, our most authentic *self* is discovered not through relationships and interactions with other human beings and the world around us but through introspection. Captured in his most famous phrase, “*Je pense, donc je suis*” (“I think, therefore I am”), this tragically limited idea continues to set the groundwork for Western

education systems. From our first school days through higher education, teaching and learning is designed to impose content on students. The primary purpose of our education system being the discovery of objective truth leaves little space for creative imagination or deeper relational connection. The presence of this pedagogy structured around ontological individualism is spectacularly depicted in Pink Floyd's classic music video "The Wall" (1979). A searing critique of factory-like structured education, this video highlights the disturbing lack of creative freedoms students are permitted as they are disciplined to become homogenized products of a colourless school system. Hearing the stories of thousands of students over our collective years in post-secondary education, we have found that this artistic representation of education is a sad reflection of many students' experiences. In the article "21st Century Child and Youth Care Education: An Ontological Relational Turn in Teaching and Learning" Bellefeuille and Bekikoff [11] have this to say,

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

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

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

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

### THE ONTOLOGICAL RELATIONAL SELF

From a relational ontological perspective, the "self" is relationally constituted; and as such, considers relationships as the foundation for optimal learning. It is essential to understand that this view does not reject the unique existence of the individual; those traits, goals and aspirations, experiences, interests, and behaviours that differentiates the person from others, but rather understands the *self* as a process of relatedness. Stated differently, the *self* is understood to be not so much a personal possession, but rather a reflection of one's lifelong relational experiences" [6]. Ken Gergen [12] insists that our relationality with others is fundamental to our very being, without it, we cannot be.

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

Educational scholar and feminist Barbara Thayer-Bacon [13] expands upon the notion of relational being by arguing that relational ontologies are non-dualistic ways of understanding the world that "emphasize we are w/holistically connected with our greater universe, materially and spiritually" (p. 7). Sidorkin [14] also concludes that the *self* is a means of connection among relations, human, things, and nature. Before going further, we ask you to recall a time in your life when you were alone, surrounded by nature or simply in your favorite place to escape from the crowd. You might consider the last time you were on a hike in the mountains, sitting in the spray as waves crashed into the ocean, or catching the sun's warm rays through your window. If you take a few moments to self-reflect, you will likely agree that, even when alone and physically isolated from others, solitude can be profoundly relational. The point is that we are always in a state of interconnectedness with other people and our surroundings. Because, as humans we are relational to the very core of our beings, we are even relationally interconnected with the rest of the cosmos in the form of the air that we breathe and the water that we drink.

### THE WHOLE ME: EMBODIED WAYS OF KNOWING

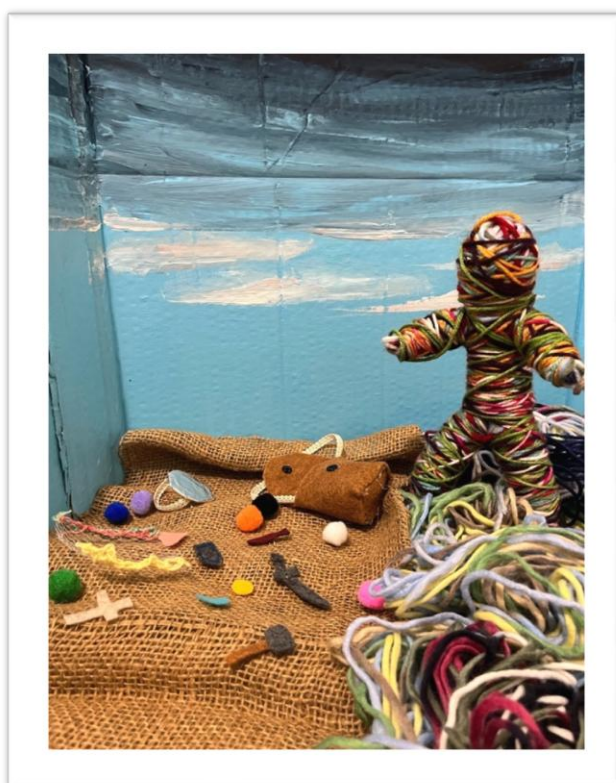
Embracing a relational ontological approach to teaching and learning fundamentally alters how curriculum is conceptualized. While traditional curriculum in CYC education is generally applied across four dimensions—(a) aims and objectives, (b) content and subject matter, (c) methods and procedures, and (d) evaluation and assessment—a relational ontological conceptualization seeks to expand how we see the curriculum by emphasizing the totality of the learning process. Instead of regarding knowledge as information that can be stockpiled within a (disembodied) mind, learning within a relational ontological perspective is understood as the development of embodied ways of knowing or being. The idea of learning through the total being swaps a linear approach based on predetermined expectations (e.g.,

student achievement) for a holistic view of teaching and learning that seeks the broadest development of the entire individual by focusing on the relationship between the head, heart, and soul, all considered essential components of the learning process[11]. Following this reasoning, an arts based CYC practice self-portrait assignment is used as the principal learning assessment for an advanced CYC practice methods course that has as its focus the integration of theory, self, and ethical practice.

### THE ARTS-BASED CYC PRACTICE SELF-PORTRAIT LEARNING ASSESSMENT

The CYC practice self-portrait assignment establishes a creative context for students to critically self-reflect on and to visually illustrate their journey of becoming a relational-centered CYC practitioner. It allows students to create narratives to share with others that are at once unique, multifaceted, provocative, and illuminating, revealing their emotions, personality, and ethics within wider cultural aspects of their being. Many of the students take this opportunity to proclaim and to celebrate their spirituality, culture, and other important aspects of their identity. At other times, the self-portrait speaks to a student's curiosity and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding life, and to the feeling of camaraderie with their classmates. The assignment empowers students to own their own ideas, develop their own voices and to listen to the ideas of others and gives students an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate each other's diversity and uniqueness. What follows are three unaltered examples of the arts-based CYC practice learning assessments complete by third year CYC students at MacEwan University.

My Self-Portrait  
By Tasha Barrow



### Self

The concept of self, or non-self, is perplexing. It feels convoluted and abstract; the more I say, the more I find. I was built on the idea of an individual, with a soul that belongs to a place that cannot be seen. Harder on myself than anyone, I found myself unconsciously taking the blame for things I had no control over and doubting my choices. I was floating in a sea of creation, where the waves and currents molded me. As I delved into the concept of this module, with motivation of my ongoing growth, I came to the realization that the non-self is an opportunity for change, and the catalyst was my 'self'. And as I began my journey, seeking change and growth, I become more connected to others and my own self, but more disconnected from some of the ways I envisioned myself before. I cannot leave behind everything that I am, and so I take them with me, to use and to leave as I continue. In order to build change for those that I will work with through my path as a CYC practitioner, I must believe in the possibility of change of others. To do so, I must believe in my own ability to change and be the driving force of my own story.



### Relational Ontology

Despite much of what I tell myself, doubt casts a shadow over me more than I would like to admit. I carry a lot with me, and I struggle with the balance of doing enough and doing too little, which sometimes distracts me from how I am in relationship with others. Even within the creation of my portrait, I am consumed by the task of building, making props, and setting scenes, maintaining some form of control before I struggle through the process of getting these words out. But my nest is comfortable – it's warm and filled with what I (think) I know. I can retreat to it.



Being relational means, I have to venture out again. Although I cannot get rid of all the ways I view life and the world, and I don't entirely want to; there are bits that I need to leave at home so that I can be relational with others. Some of my ontology I frequently left out were things like my faith (partially because it lies with some traditions and overall belief in a God but delves into more spirituality than anything). Others I learned to leave in my progression through the CYC program, like my defense mechanisms and my views deriving from my socioeconomic status. Yet sometimes I think that I have left them behind when trying to build connections, but they linger. Sometimes I think that I need a means of protecting myself and my views, other times I bring my worries. But not everything needs to be left every time. In order to be genuine, I will need to bring aspects of myself. I will need to be curious and be conscious of how I am impacting those I work with. My journey is far from over, and I will have to fish in any waters I can for the rest of my existence. But I do feel my own growth. My bag is fluctuating as I learn more. I make mistakes, certainly, and will likely have some doubts throughout the process, but I am slowly building onto my net in hopes of understanding more while keeping core structures within the net that fulfill my life and were built as skills to relating with others, like empathy and honesty. When I look at just my net and the things that I have caught and held on to, it can sometimes seem bleak or

disappointing. But when I look at the bigger picture, the process, the growth, the connecting to things around me – it is breathtaking. Or giving. Like breathing in crisp air.



### **Paradigms and Life Positioning**

Paradigms became a sort of blow to my ego. I thought that I was getting better at being relational, but I am starting to come to the realization that I am fitting behaviours, decisions, and beliefs into my own paradigms or life position to make sense of them. This habit of mine can have positive outcomes, sure, but I do not know if it counts as empathy if you don't actually understand. Creating a narrative for someone else can have many negative impacts. I may not engage as well with a co-worker which can affect other workers or young people I am working with. Misinterpreting the paradigms of a child, youth, or family's life positioning can directly influence how I choose to work with them. Essentially, I sometimes create a sort of visual block or picture of others that limits everyone involved.



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### Theoretical Frameworks

#### Smaller

Cognitive. Psychosocial. Moral. Attachment. Behavioural.



Words that I have known, but that have changed throughout the course of my journey through CYC. They became words that I had to think about; had to start applying to what I was seeing and experiencing. It started with me. How did I respond? What did I think? Feel? Want? Hide? What led to this 'me' that is and where do I fall on these seemingly clearly defined scales? The process of changing started, as it needed to, but there were still some areas of strength that could build my confidence when I felt doubt and uncertainty. Things like my compass, which guided me to this field, and the protective factors that tied me to the thirst for better. I was molded through my experiences, threads winding around and around to create what you see. And like me, others will have reasons for how and who they are, most of which is a culmination of the world around them. My biases can impede my ability to see others clearly, but the frameworks that I have learned can provide questions and understanding of where others are developmentally that could be in the way of their ability to connect and heal. With a theoretical baseline, I can more effectively support others through their development and change process. That being said, the theories I go back to are connected to my own view of what is important, and sometimes what is easy.

### *To Bigger*

As I take a step back, or maybe several steps forward, the lines separating the theories and concepts that attempt to define development become blurred. Behaviours, perspectives, reasoning, and capabilities lead to a mesh of different frameworks, with pieces both scattered and connected. Interwoven and blended. Each experience a person has does not count towards one aspect of their development nor does the 'stuckness' in one stage define the rest. Simply, I cannot look at only one theory, nor can I take every word of a framework as fact or as a checklist that indicates the success or failure of a person.

*I walk with what I carry; my compass guiding me, my glasses on, and my cloak left in a pile at the edge of the water.*

Theoretical frameworks are a way in which I can foster some comprehension of how people develop and how to stimulate them further, but the lines are undefined, and the uniqueness of each person requires flexibility. The frameworks that I turn to; resiliency theory, attachment theory, moral development, and so forth; are ways in which I can uncover what a person finds important, which can in turn become a part of development and growth.



### **Ethics**

#### **Explore.**

**Dive past the surface.**

**Where do I fit? What of me am I projecting?**

#### **Choice.**

**Shed indecision.**

**What can I live with? What can I do?**

#### **Responsibility.**

**Own your actions.**

**What's next? What do I know better now?**



In all honesty, decisiveness isn't my strong suit. I needlessly worry and overanalyze all potential options, from choosing what to order at a new restaurant to even writing this part. Which I restarted three times. To utilize ethics in practice, I need to stop teetering from one side to the other. It begins with exploration, where all factors are taken into consideration. Who is involved? What are the pros and cons for every person in connection to this dilemma? Even then, I cannot take the 'me' out of this equation entirely, thus, recognizing my own biases, values, and positioning is vital in this expedition. One minute choice can spread like spores, affecting everything it touches. Within this exploration, curiosity is necessary, as is the context of each moment, experience, and circumstance. Then, with the fullest picture I can gather. With each potential option laid out in my mind to the best of what I am – it is time to consider action. What am I presently capable of? I have limitations, so what are they? I must do the best I can and avoid promising anything that I can't. I must stand with my choice and own my responsibility in the outcomes I contribute to. This not only takes into consideration the process in which I made the choice, or the choice itself, but what I do after choosing a pasture in which I have planted my feet. Living with something doesn't just mean lying awake ruminating in the middle of the night.

*But saying and doing are two very different things. Much of my ethical decision making has been without knowledge or understanding of what that even really means. I have only just opened the doors.*

#### **Relational Centered CYC is . . .**

Recognizing life positioning and biases. Empathy and curiosity. Being able to hold and see the experiences of others and being curious in searching for and uncovering what we don't know.

Thinking ethically, advocating for self and others, and taking responsibility for your choices. Bringing myself into my practice with the acknowledgement that my 'self' is a creation of the world and that others are impacted by me as much as I am by them.

The understanding of the need to be, and the ability to be, flexible. As a person. In my own beliefs and perceptions – With developmental theories that can help me comprehend the place where others are and provide building blocks that contribute to growth but can also become the podium that I stand on.

Attachment. The ability to connect and build relationships.

Resiliency. Support, being, and trust.

Ecological. The circumstances and experiences in which we exist over time.

Moral. The reasoning we attach to our actions and ourselves.

Lighthouse and the Sea  
*A Journey of Exploring in a CYC Light*  
*Ebbing and Flowing, Growing and Glowing*  
By: Jennika Kuruliak



*Sometimes I am the Lighthouse, sometimes I am the Sea*

### **My Sea Shanty**

*Sometimes I am the lighthouse, sometimes I am the sea  
Sometimes they shine upon me, sometimes I call to thee  
Sometimes I break upon the shore, sometimes I stand so tall  
Sometimes I am the guide post, sometimes I wander free...*

### **Chapter 1: Relational Ontology**

*"Is there a real you?"*

"...who I am is always changing, growing, transforming, and responding to the environment, people, and experiences all around me. I understand that I am not a constant, I have a consciousness that drives me forward with desires for new experiences and opportunities to learn. Just because I know, think, and believe something today does not mean that in a few days or months from now I will still hold all the same perspectives because new information could come in that creates a shift within my thoughts and experiences." ~Jennika Kuruliak (Assignment 1-2)

I have been called a lighthouse and a calming presence many times. Even people I do not know well have expressed that they feel a sense of calm when they are around me. I sometimes found this strange, knowing that in some of these instances, I have felt anxious internally. I have come to see myself within the image of a lighthouse and within water, which can be both calming and otherwise emotional and stormy. Both the lighthouse and the sea have their limits. Both have their strengths and purposes. Both are still open to the other, challenged and changed by one another (process).

## The Lighthouse

The lighthouse is what makes sense. It is currently confirmed knowledge, understanding, and the parts of myself and my journey I can own and shine with. Even shine out as wisdom for others. The light in the lighthouse is a candle because sometimes the light goes out. The lighthouse may need repairs and updates and sometimes needs to let the sea be rocky for a while to understand and clarify its purpose and identity. I am human. I make mistakes and have my faults. I'm not perfect. I have doubts and moments of hopelessness, and that's when I become the sea and need others to be a lighthouse for me. The lighthouse doesn't simply stand alone. It needs maintenance and improvements, but it is a beacon of hope, calm, and safety which I hope to be for others as well.



A lighthouse isn't afraid of the storms or the chaos of those out at sea. I feel I have grown resilience and even excitement from my experiences navigating my own storms. It is because I am also the sea that I am able to be the lighthouse. Once I myself have traveled a path, I am better able to help someone else navigate a similar path and lend them the tools I have obtained along the way. I've heard it said that when our hearts break, they don't just fall apart. They break open to let new light, love, and beauty out. This is a gift for both us and those around us when we use and harness the experience in a healthy way. Experiences, even difficult ones, are what help intensify the light that shines from within. The lighthouse is always open to the sea but is more grounded in certain truths and ontologies.

## The Sea



The sea is when I am challenged. Caught up in my own uncertainty and emotional experiences. I may be of little use to others in this state, but it is part of refining who I am and being open to newness. As I rethink my beliefs and perspectives, I go through storms of change, reflection, and questions. A chaos of swirling and crashing thoughts and emotions until, eventually, it all comes to new understandings wrapped up as good lessons or gifts. This is the process that brings me back to the lighthouse state. Sometimes the most broken, challenging, and dark points in my life have been when I learned, grew, and changed the most. Not all growth and change is scary and dark, but they do feel like storms, and I gain new pieces of myself through others. I am generally not afraid to dive into stormy waters with people because I hold a belief that all things can be worked out for good, but I also know how comforting and powerful it can be to have someone else just be there in the process. I highly relate to the depth and emotional essence of water. I have a limited understanding of the astrological belief systems, but I have found that I resonated with my Scorpio water sign.

Especially with the idea of feeling deep undercurrents of emotional energy around me and having empathy to hold space for those going through dark and challenging things. I hope with time and trust, these things can be brought into a gentle light to be transformed for a brighter future.

### **Relational Me**

*“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.” ~Albert Schweitzer*

*“An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle but will never break.”*

*~Chinese Proverb~*



This background contains pictures and artifacts from relationships and experiences that have been significant in changing or shaping my current ontology. These are the memories that came strongly to mind during module two. I went through a lot of relational ontological shifts and changes in the last couple of years, but in particular, this last year, I broke, repaired, and changed my net. While these memories are laced with pain and heartbreak, they contained abundant gifts... sometimes my net was not ready for these gifts, and as I saw them pass by or rip right through my net, I was caused to stop and think. To reconsider my net and, even if I was in the middle of a storm, take it apart to rebuild it in new ways that matched my changes in beliefs, desires, and knowledge so those gifts would not again escape or shred my net.

During module two, I came across this proverb. This is not the first time I have come across it, but the first time I sat to think deeper about what it means to me as I had relational ontology on my mind. While it may look as though the red strings are broken, this was not the idea I was getting at. The idea is that there are multiple threads all over the place, and we never know when we will encounter them. We do not have only one soul connection; we have many.

In my expression, the broken glass with red strings signifies the ties we have to others and experiences. Sometimes people come into our lives to teach us something, or love us for a little while, or show us something we want/need to change. I believe there are deep connections we hold with people, experiences, places, and things that are soul-deep and maybe divinely planned or arranged that even if/when we lose physical connection with these things, the soul-deep connection is never broken. The love, value, lessons, importance, and general connection are still at play, still under and still irreplaceable because they were a part of our journey, a part of our story, a part of who we have become and what we want to do. They are threads in our makeup and a part of our relational being. If they weren't there, we wouldn't be exactly as we are now. Something even subtle would be different. We are all a part of each other in this way, which makes the expression, “you are missing from me”, as expressed by the French phrase, “tu me manques”, hits so much harder. To me, the French phrase and Chinese proverb hold undercurrents of each other and are a basis for the expression in my background. Because these things are a part of us (relational self), they may be physically missing, but their place can never be fully filled by something or someone else. Further emphasizing the value of each person as an individual who is unique and divinely, irreplaceably, and UNCONDITIONALLY WORTHY.

The red string represents those connections and relational ties that have built me, even if they were from or remain in a state of broken disrepair. They are still meaningful and gave me indescribable, intangible gifts that I would never want to be without. From these red threads of connection, my net is woven anew and repaired as I am affected by my relational experiences.

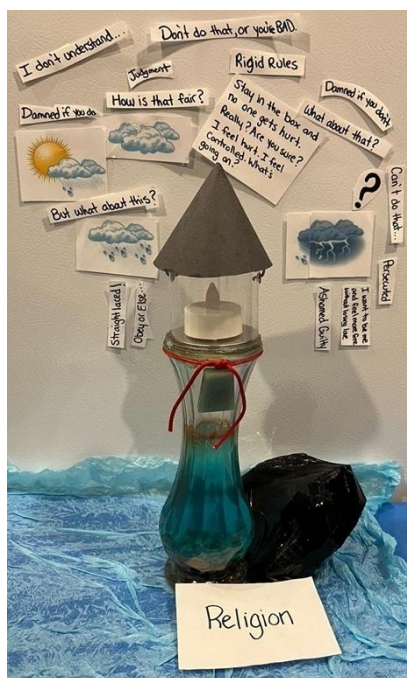
## Chapter 2: Paradigms and Life Positionings

*“Open minded people do not impose their beliefs on others. They accept that we all have a different perspective of life, and do their own thing in peace without judgment” ~Steven Aitchison*



Different shores, different skies  
Different (life) position, different paradigm

The rocks represent life positioning, while the weather represents paradigms. Where someone is and the kind of foundations they are built on will determine the paradigms and perspectives they hold about the world which can contribute to the things they think and believe about themselves and others. One lighthouse may be in sunny California or dreamy Hawaii, while another lighthouse might be in the snowy Arctic. The rocks represent life positioning, while the weather represents paradigms. Where someone is and the kind of foundations they are built on will determine the paradigms and perspectives they hold about the world. Which can contribute to the things they think and believe about themselves and others.



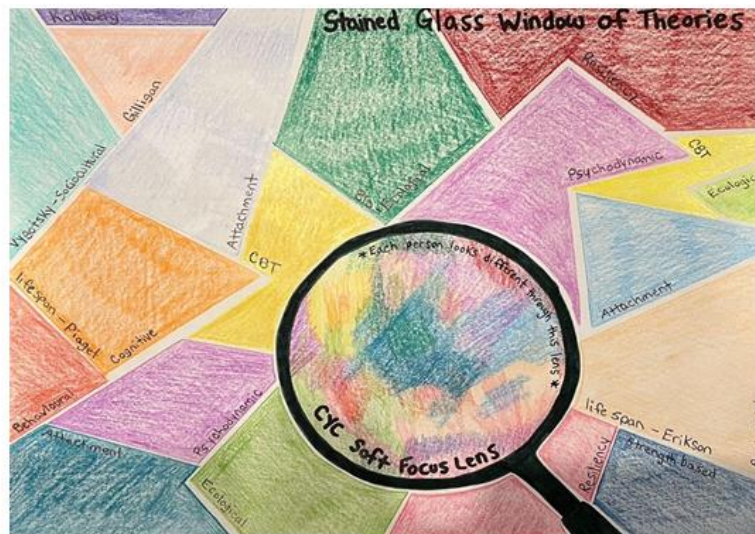




### Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks

“Look for the small improvements, recognize those successes and let them be a big deal!”

~Elise Cripe



Interacting with and responding to learning, integrating the theories into my being, person, and CYC. Who am I becoming as a result of these learnings and understandings? What are they removing, replacing, or bringing out of me? What gifts and treasures do they hold for me? It can be a challenge to explore and understand new theories in an in-depth way. It requires a release of what is previously known to see what can be found. I would never have thought to ask the questions of this module, but it was a brilliant way to explore more of the wisdom and limitations the theories hold. With a curious spirit, I was able to find where the theories fit for me and help me grow deeper into my non-self. I'm open to the theories having their place within my practice, but some resonated greatly like treasures, while others still seem to pass me by. They're not lost forever; I just need more time and probably a new paradigm to see where they fit. I'll put on my CYC lens to see how the theories blend.

### Ships to Shore

I spy some boats ahead, some boats abroad, and some boats ashore.

Some I see and vaguely catch within my light, while others are clear as can be, others still come right up to me and deposit their treasures on the shore, in the rocks, among my foundation, and even into the walls of my very essence, fixing the places the storms broke and swept away.



Behaviour the savior, in power too long.



Lifespan has a plan, but psycho and eco will have none of that. They scramble and gamble the sureness for go fish. Hoping they catch what's good with a wish. (Life span theories provide an order and structure but nurturing and environments can be unexpected.)

Attachment I'll catch it, have a seat at the table. She's taken a teacup and poured to the rim. Though things may be grim, and the chances are slim, she'll stay at the brim until her smart mouth has sung and been burned at the tongue. Making her think before she can sink. (It takes a moment of realization to become aware of one's attachment style and

consciousness to change so it stops being destructive and unhealthy. Insecure Attachment can be improved after we make the conscious choice.)

Psychodynamic, how deep down, and drastic, that dissociative dark hole I dug in the basement, he's dug out and danced in and decked out in daisies. That psycho, how psycho, he's exposed my defenses. His express of repress has made a mural in my mess hall. (Understanding defense mechanisms and how expressive therapies can help us heal.)



Resilience with brilliance can patch all the holes. With a hammer and nails and a ladder, she scales. (Resiliency is what allows us to get through and come back from all kinds of hardships.)

I welcome the visitors who help me learn and grow. Their maintenance and improvements making my light glow.

### *Bringing some things home with me*

#### **My Sea Shanty**

*Sometimes I go to sea, sometimes I wander free  
Sometimes I catch within my net some treasures true to me  
Sometimes they come to me, sometimes I set them free  
Sometimes they slip right from my net, sometimes they stay to live with me*



When there is something to ponder, I go out and wander... but I never forget to bring out my net so I may catch every feather, each treasure, with personal measure.

#### **Chapter 4: Ethical Reasoning and Decision Making**

*"Just keep swimming..." ~Dory (Finding Nemo)*

*"Integrity is the seed for achievement. It is the principle that never fails." ~Earl Nightingale, Elisabeth Hancock, Einstein*



I hold ethics of care, respect, compassion, courage, and authenticity. These add up to love, although controversial because of its wide range of meanings. I think this is largely because of the limitations of our English language, as other languages have words to distinguish various kinds of love, which make the distinctions more appropriate for the work we do.

The love I hold for my work in the field is nothing like a romantic love which would, in fact, be inappropriate. It is a universal love of and for all, like a comforting blanket of connection that sees and believes and values the worthiness and potential of all. Like an ecological blanket of love not bordered by differences or challenged by change, it holds humans and nature, earth, sky, and water, fires that burn, rivers that sing, mountains and muskeg, animals and ant hills, early morning sky's, trees, birds, and buffalo's, right down to the dirt. It holds all and believes in all, encouraging the best for all.



The Greek language addresses this as it has many words for the different styles of love. The one I am referring to as an ethic for my CYC practice is “agape,” meaning love for everyone.

From my Christian background, this is the love that God holds for all creation. A full, universal, unconditional, forgiving, and understanding love.

I am human and may not be able to be perfect at this abundant love all the time, but I will do my best and reflect on the rest because this ethic is important, and I seek to hold it strong. Each day, each stumble, each rise, and each fall, I find a new lesson to curate them all (Ethics).

*Ethics can be tricky,  
Like a slippery fishy,  
We may think we hold them tight,  
But from out of sight,  
They wiggle and wobble,  
And wash with the waves.  
Except for these few that seem to be true,  
Through and through,  
They're stuck here like glue.  
This fountain of fishes,  
Could grant many wishes.  
In my heart,  
They've become a great part,  
Of my CYC standard,  
Of ethics and praxis.*



### **Chapter 5: Relational Centered CYC Practice and Praxis**

*“Many people spend too much time trying to be the captain of someone else’s boat. Learn to be a lighthouse and the boats will find their way.” ~Unknown*

*“The scars you share become lighthouses for people who are headed for the same rocks you hit.” ~Unknown*



I'll shine my light farther,  
Bolder and broader,  
Far over the water.  
Empathy,  
Emit from me.  
Compassion,  
Please fashion,  
My curiosity ration.  
With care,  
I stare,  
Out at the sea.  
The travelers that flea,  
From shipwrecks that be,  
I reach out to thee,  
Find refuge with me.  
I'll share all my treasure,  
It's here in good measure,  
For anyone needing a trustworthy hand.  
Be humble my light,  
And don't cause any fright.  
Seek to understand,  
What will bring them safely to land.  
Thank you for exploring with me!  
Connecting Through Knowledge

### **Starting to Re-think**



I chose a butterfly to represent my self-image as butterflies have always been significant symbols in my life and growing up. I chose a butterfly because they are fragile but resilient. Butterflies are vulnerable, yet they manage to make their way through the world with grace. I gave the butterfly multiple layers representing my past, present and future self which are all apart of who I am as well as who I will become and as I am gifted new knowledge more layers will be added. My true self is and will always be under construction as I grow internally and relationally. I'm tethered to my past and where I came from, but it does not define me or hold me back from developing my potential. I am learning to love change and appreciate the uncomfortable. I want to become more connected with those around me and notice the impact others have had on my life and the impact I've had on the lives of others, no matter how small; the good and the bad.

*"I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it" - Maya Angelou*

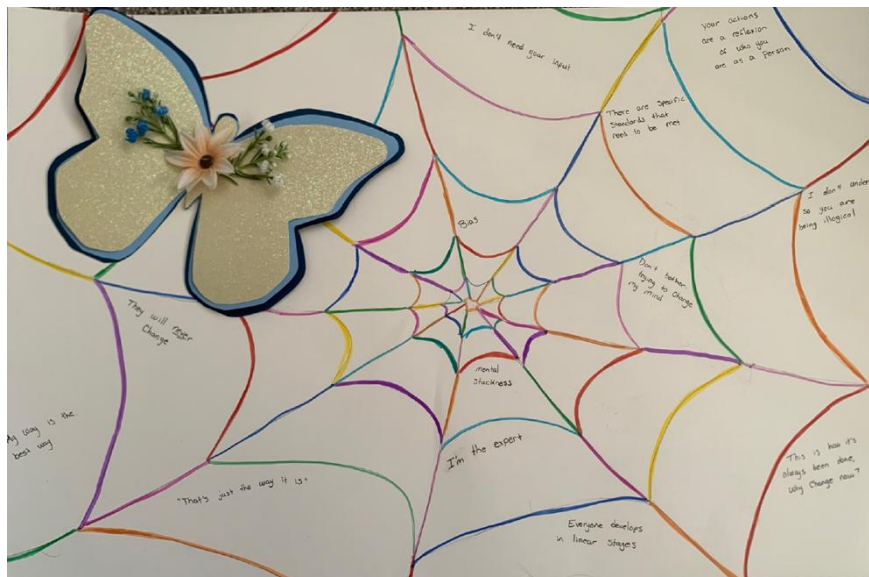


I'm not sure how my perspectives will change and grow, but I journey toward the future with optimism and an understanding that my aim is not to reach an end goal but to be present and absorb the experiences and knowledge along the way. I am beginning to recognize and appreciate the differences of others and take note as we pass through each other's lives. I can never fully understand how their journeys have shaped them or know all the pieces of life they've held on to which tether them to their past, influencing their present self. Despite this, I will do my best to try by acknowledging the internal and external factors that surround and connect us all.

*Have compassion for everyone you meet,  
even if they don't want it. What seems conceit,*

*bad manners, or cynicism is always a sign  
of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen.  
You do not know what wars are going on  
Down there where the spirit meets the bone.  
-Miller Williams*

## Stuck



I have begun to realize that theoretical frameworks if looked at too concretely have the potential to trap us in a specific way of thinking. If we take a framework and use it as a be-all and end-all, we can get trapped in our thinking. Knowledge should move fluidly through our thoughts and minds and contribute to the addition of new perspectives, not deter them like a bug to a spiderweb. If we get trapped in this web, we will not be able to grow or learn from our experiences or help others overcome obstacles. We need to be able to let go of previous assumptions and biases in order to help those around us and practice empathetically. If we get caught in the web, the web becomes full of unchangeable and outdated mindsets. We will not have space or time to do our job effectively, as we will be too busy fighting to defend and make the select few tools we have work somewhere they most likely do not fit.

I like to look at constructing a theoretical framework as using a butterfly net to capture insects. The insects represent our thought processes and beliefs. We have some ability to choose how we implement what we learn from our experiences and relationships, but there's more fluidity to it than the web. As our paradigms shift and our environments change, the butterflies and bugs we've caught in the past will adapt, there will be new additions, and some may even leave. This constant exchange adaptation and renewal of our theoretical framework allows us to be effective practitioners that can use new knowledge to help inform how we work with others. We are relational beings, so it only makes sense that we connect with our surroundings and other beings around us. No two frameworks will look the same, but everyone's framework is made up of a collection of our past and present selves, relationships, and experiences. It shapes how we choose to show up in our work.

*"Those who can't change their mind can't change anything."*

*-George Bernard Shaw*

*"Coming out of your comfort zone is tough in the beginning, chaotic in the middle, and awesome in the end...because in the end, it shows you a whole new world! Make an attempt."*

*-Monoj Arora*

## Accepting Change



Caught in my net:

- Maslow's Hierarchy of needs.
- Development is a continuous process.
- Change is important and inevitable.
- Nature & nurture are both important when considering development.
- Explore the gaps in your knowledge and find strength in the uncomfortable.
- People are not the sum of their parts.
- No two people have the same paradigms or life experiences.
- Developmental theories are useful tools but should not be used to define or hold a person back.
- I will not always be understood, and I won't always fully understand others, but it's important to try.
- My framework and beliefs will change and grow with new life experiences.
- The past cannot be changed or erased but we must accept it and recognize its importance.
- People will come and go, but many of them will leave a lasting impact, and we will do the same for others.
- We are relational beings at our core.
- Free will is only possible to an extent. Our relationships, childhood, history, genetic factors, and environment all play a role in the opportunities that are presented to us, we have a finite number of choices to pick from.

## Understanding Ethical Reasoning



I believe I now have a deeper understanding of the complexity of being ethical and how it can be difficult to truly stand for something. As we navigate the maze in our minds, it can lead us to question what informs morality and the possible barriers and implications of what it means to be moral and ethical along the way. Moral reasoning is not always a determinant of ethical decision-making. When we are stripped to our base, our bare bones, all of the contributing factors that molded our paradigms as we developed will become more evident. It is when we can truly discover what we stand for and what influences our everyday decisions and determine how we distinguish right from wrong. We can always gain new knowledge, but we all have something in us that we stand for, even if we are not exactly sure what it is yet. We gain knowledge which potentially results in changes of our ethical reasoning as we develop a better understanding of our world and our interactions with others. Regardless, we will always have some core belief or value that informs our decisions, creating that “gut feeling.” We sometimes experience these moral grey areas where the lines between right and wrong begin to blur, this is where it is beneficial to know or determine if our decision reflects our core beliefs and how we want to show up, in our career and our personal lives.

*“The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depends on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life”-Albert Einstein*

### **What Relational Practice Means to Me**

Relational practice is a mindset. It means always being curious and leaving space for new knowledge that will help us better understand perspectives we wouldn't otherwise consider. Everyone and everything are connected and when we practice relationally, we are able to help guide and support people, even connect them to pieces of themselves and their lives they weren't aware of before. When we are relational, we do so with patience and empathy while being physically and emotionally present with others.

### **CONCLUSION**

A key assumption underpinning arts-based teaching and learning pedagogies is the belief that creativity is central to human learning. The strength of the education achieved through creative and experiential arts-based methods is that these methods tap directly into the human experience by inviting the learner to attend to alternative ways of knowing and sense-making, which is visibly shown from the three self-portrait examples profiled in this article. Perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for the use of relational art-based strategies is that they also promote student awareness of the breadth of voices and perspectives on global issues of social justice, diversity, and human rights, enabling classroom environments to accommodate broader mixtures of cultural learning styles and communication patterns. As such, arts-based methodologies also provide unique, compelling pathways for teaching and learning that permit entry to—and support the success of—all students, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, religion, linguistic diversity, ability level, socioeconomic status, and other identity categories. As a university instructor, I have found this approach particularly effective for students who struggle with the fast-paced and highly structured nature of mainstream education, which leans heavily on cognitive and verbal forms of teaching and assessment. Additionally, relational, arts-based teaching and learning also recognize the inherent value of each learner within flexible and individualized assessments, prioritizing

content quality over format. Taken together, this approach has the potential to support broader initiatives of equity and inclusion by grounding post-secondary classrooms in an approach of curiosity and humility that welcomes diversity.

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