



Relational Education? The Relationship in Professional Education



INSPIRING TEACHING,
TRANSFORMING LEARNING

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Unity Through Relationships
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Conference Aim

“... to commence a dialogue in pursuit of synergies and unified practice with recognition of the centrality of relationship as the core of all our work.”

Aim of this session

To explore the role and processes of professional education in supporting the central core of relationship in our work with children, young people, their families and each other.

Structure of the session

- Threshold Concepts Study
- How to 'teach' relationship?
- Implications for pedagogical practice

Who are the 'we' in 'our' work and 'each other'?

I propose what unifies us is work in life-space and increasingly a life-space perspective.

Life-space: a unified space, consisting of the physical, mental, virtual and relational dimensions, in which the life of the child, young person or family unfolds (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013a, 2013b).

Threshold Concepts

- A type of core concept
- Opens up new, previously inaccessible ways of thinking
- Can be thought of as a portal or threshold to another level

5 Characteristics of Threshold Concepts

- they are **transformative**, once they're understood;
- they are **irreversible** – it is virtually impossible to forget them once they're understood;
- they are **integrative** in their capacity promote the connection of previously unconnected ideas;
- they are **bounded** in that they often help to define the scope or boundaries of a subject area; and
- they are **troublesome** in that they can initially be counterintuitive or hard to grasp. (Meyer and Land, 2006a)

Once Threshold Concepts are Grasped

- Students move from more basic, compartmentalised understanding to one that is foundational, coherent and integrative, permeating the acquisition of new knowledge and ideas (Meyer & Land, 2006b).
- Extension of language and discourse transforms not just understanding but often identities and world views (Meyer & Land, 2005).

Threshold Concepts and RCC/ CYC/Social Pedagogy/Youth Work/Therapeutic Communities

- There is “substantial empirical evidence for threshold concepts in the disciplines, drawn from over 150 scholarly papers in 80 disciplinary or subject contexts” (Land, 2011, p. 177).
- Threshold concepts hold potential to assist in the development and delivery of curriculum for RCC/CYC and in shifting discourses about residential child care, but have yet to be applied.

The Study

- Funded by the Higher Education Association in the UK with match funding from the University of Strathclyde
- Exploring the relevance and particular threshold concepts or areas of threshold learning in CYC
 - Focus groups of expert/educators
 - Focus groups of student/practitioners
 - Individual interviews with a subset of student/practitioners
- Traditional dissemination plus: online learning objects for the Learning Zone (on CYC Net); handbook; webinar.

Preliminary Findings



Discussions in
E/E focus
groups
expansive,
fascinating,
'messy'.

Identifying
clearly defined
and
demarcated
TC's is going to
be like herding
cats.

Preliminary Findings

Focus Groups with Student/
Practitioners covered far less breadth
(still early stages of analysis)

Shifting from 'threshold concepts' to
'threshold areas of learning' or
'threshold areas of practice'.

Both sets of focus groups had the
same top two themes (frequency/
duration)

- Relationship
- Self

Definite evidence of a transformative process

I went from thinking that a good relationship made the work a bit easier to thinking it was central to the work.

Transformations in

- understanding others' perspectives
- Understanding self
- Understanding boundaries
- Understanding behaviour

Troublesome aspects of relationship as a threshold area of learning and practice:

- Boundaries
- Setting limits/boundaries
- The everyday nature of the work
- The stuff of the self
- Power
- Vulnerability
- Notions of 'professionalism'
- From the tacit to the explicit
- From theory to practice

“It is not widely recognized that there is a ‘relationship skill’. In many practice settings, relationship-based work is mandated by the policies and procedures of the employer, but there are no specific skills articulated to support this mandate. For many employers, most of whom are not themselves professionals within the child and youth care field, relationship development is viewed as an innate skill, one that everyone has to some degree and that is furthered primarily by effort and attention to the prescriptions of policies and procedures”

(Gharabaghi, 2010, p.87)

“...although there is some recognition in the literature of the central role of the ‘use of self’ in social work and other forms of professional practice, and especially of its contribution to ‘relationship-based practice’...there is not much recent work on the question of how to educate practitioners for this aspect of their practice” (Ward, 2008, p.68).

The Matching Principle

- Education for working in and with relationship never just about learning information and acquiring mechanical competencies;
- The educational experience must match up to the complex demands of relationship-based practice;
- We should aim for the ‘felt experience’ of the learning situation to correspond in certain key ways with core elements of the professional practice in question. (Ward, 2010)

- Placing a premium on working with the experience and process of the helping relationship;
- Attending to the emotional as well as cognitive elements in practice;
- Maximising the opportunities for helpful communication;
- Attending to the need for reflection at a deep level;
- Focusing on the self of the worker;
- An emphasis on personal qualities and values.

(Ward, 2010, p. 185)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELATIONSHIP?

**AND WHAT ABOUT OUR
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT
TRADITIONS?**



Therapeutic Community Understanding:

- Begins with an awareness of how complex it is for children to make new relationships and therefore how complex it is for the adults who make themselves available for such relationships;
- Crucial part of the care task is to provide young people with opportunities to form relationships that are positive;
 - Relationships that challenge and that within which children can feel loveable, creative and worthwhile.
 - And within which they can make sense of current and previous experiences

(Worthington, 2003).

History

- Early models of relationship-based practice criticised for pathologising service users, individualising problems and positioning the professional as the expert ...
- ... resulting in a “significant shift towards predominantly socially oriented practice which paid insufficient attention to the psychological dimensions of people’s lives”
(Ruch, 2010, p.20).

Conceptualisations of the helping relationship:

- Helper 'providing' a certain kind of relationship:
 - one-way,
 - 'out there',
 - to be used therapeutically,
 - in the hands of the worker.
- Being in relationship
 - Different from having a relationship
 - Recognition of mutuality

(Garfat, 2008)

Relationships

Relationship-based practice characterised by these understandings:

- Human behaviours & the professional relationship are integral;
- People are not simply rational beings – affective (conscious & unconscious) dimensions enrich and complicate;
- Internal & external worlds are inseparable, therefore psychosocial responses are necessary; (Ruch, 2010)

Relationship-based practice characterised by these understandings:

- Each encounter and individual are unique; attention must be paid to specific circumstance;
- A collaborative relationship is the means through which interventions are channelled, requiring a particular emphasis on use of self;
- Respect for individuals involves inclusive and empowering practice
(Ruch, 2010).

Relationships

“While focusing on the “aspects of relationship” substantiates the claim that one is using a relationship-based approach, it is my contention that the terms *relational approach* and *relational practice* refer to something different, deeper and more complex ... relational practice involves a focus on the relationship, while recognising and respecting the characteristics of the individuals involved in that relationship. Relational work, in contrast, attends to the relationship itself” (Garfat, 2008, p.19-20).

Relationships

Current conceptualisation (from a CYC perspective) of Relationship as a co-created, connected experiencing with other (from within the life-space).

“Attending to the in-between between us, the relational, is different than attending to the content, or even the process, of relationship development”

(Garfat, 2008, p.30).

Implications for pedagogical practice:

The use of self of the 'educator'

- Emotional availability
- Presence of an authentic self
- Ability to hold students in mind
- Commitment
- Trustworthiness
- Modelling
- Language
- Playfulness

The work (and sometimes hard work) of relationship.

Implications for pedagogical practice:

The classroom as holding environments

- Attending to the needs of the group and the individuals within it
- Co-creating safety and challenge
- Sharing expertise
- Containing anxiety
 - Feelings made manageable
 - Predictable structures
 - Making sense
- Tacit to the explicit

Implications for pedagogical practice:

The educator as an experience arranger?
(Phelan, 2001)

Implications for pedagogical practice:

An added level for considering congruence across Anglin's (2002) 11 interactional dynamics?

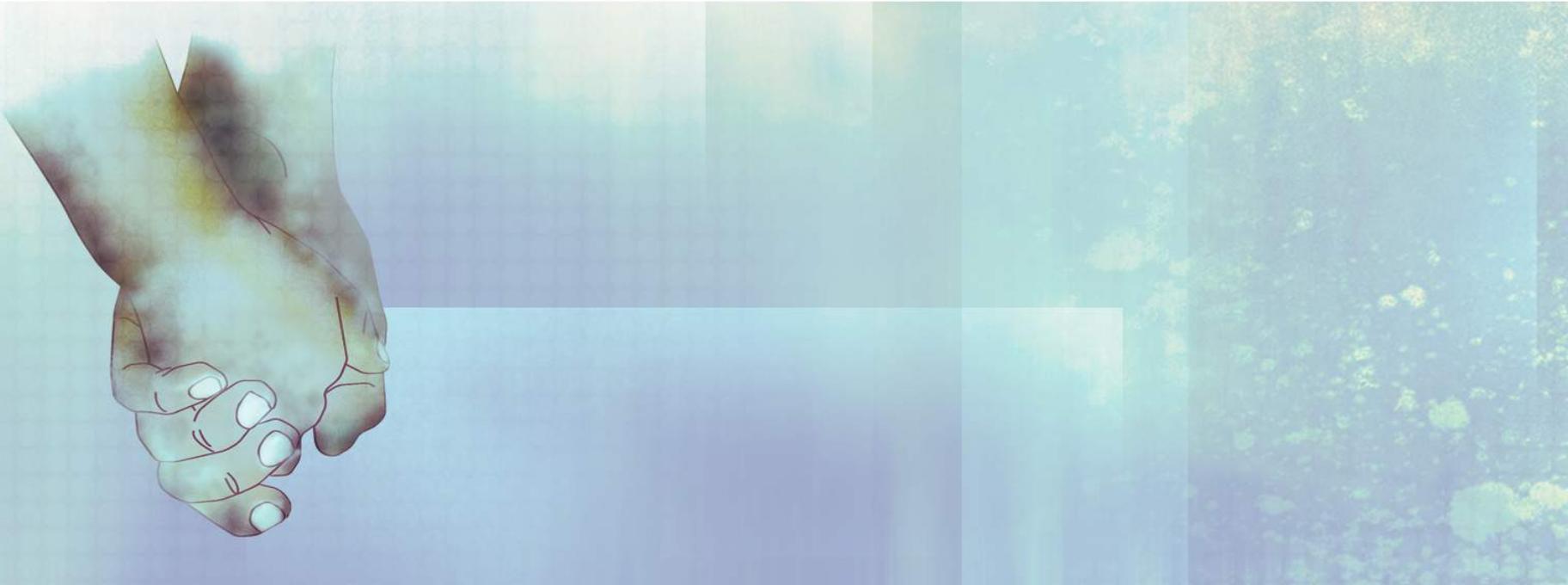
- listening and responding with respect;
- communicating a framework for understanding;
- building rapport and relationship;
- establishing structure, routine and expectations;
- inspiring commitment;
- offering emotional and developmental support;
- challenging thinking and action;
- sharing power and decision-making;
- respecting personal space and time;
- discovering and uncovering potential; and
- providing resources.

Implications for pedagogical practice:

Outward facing

- Advocacy
- Language
- Research
- Connecting
 - Through writing
 - Through conferences
 - Through collaborative projects
- Connecting different traditions
- Connecting front-line practitioners with policy makers with academics with external managers with care leavers

**WHAT UNIFIES US AND WHAT
DISTINGUISHES US AND HOW DOES
RELATED CLARITY SUPPORT
PRACTICE?**



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