

# CYC Education Day: Reflections on experiences

*Matty Hillman*

I find there is something auspicious about the first day of a new month and this May certainly held up to that expectation. Child and Youth Care (CYC) Education Day was a one-day preconference event that took place on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, one day prior to the National Child and Youth Care conference in Richmond, British Columbia. A collection of students, educators, and community partners met for a full day of exploration and inquiry into the CYC post-secondary classroom and curriculum. It has now been a month since CYC Education Day and I still find myself deeply appreciative of what was a truly formative experience.

The stated aim of the day was to foster connection and creativity between CYC learners and CYC educators, and began with something called 10 x 10 x 10: a fast-paced collection of 10 presentations, each 10 minutes long, utilizing around 10 presentation slides. In a fashion true to CYC flexibility (and CYC math), the 10 presentations turned into 13. These 13 presentations and the follow-up World Café discussions were captivating and renewed a sense of youthfulness and inspiration to CYC education. It's hard to pick a favorite presentation but I was impressed with Humber students Reshma Shiwcharran and Brittany Herbold's dynamic, informative and humorous critique of their home college's diploma program. Through speaking from their own experiences, the students posed the astute question: should former youth-in-care be required to take a class that explores the experiences of youth-in-care? For my contribution, I explored the possibility of including art-based practices in the CYC classroom to support student learning and provide space for demonstrating other ways of knowing. Utilizing sequential photographs of a "CYC graffiti-style mural" I had executed at an earlier date, I illustrated my recent learnings as a nascent CYC educator. An image of the final painting can be found at the conclusion of this article.

I've been taking some time to reflect on the various ideas presented in the 10 X 10 X 10s through observing Melissa Kendzierski's amazing graphic recordings of the day. A theme has begun to stand out strongly for me when viewing these beautifully illustrated ideas: I see experiences being at the heart of what some of us currently do and hope to do with CYC education.

Arts-based pedagogy is ultimately about having a creative experience in the classroom. Taking a sled across the frozen ocean with your instructor and classmates is an incredible experience outside of the classroom. The use of online education platforms including new teaching and learning tools is about sculpting a specific experience in the virtual world. Creating trauma-informed education is certainly about crafting the learning experience to fit the needs of the individual. In short: it's all about having experiences!

This idea of learning through experiences fits well with the direction higher education is taking. Students, administrators and other faculty often tell me that this is what today's students are looking for in their post secondary program – experiences. Experiences are about being in the moment. They are about trying something new with little or no expectations about what this experience ultimately means or what it may lead to. They are about the process more than the product – and there are so many experiences to have, so many options these days, that the experiences being offered better be unique and dynamic.

Long gone are the days of treating students as empty vessels dutifully waiting to be filled with knowledge. I feel that it is not overstating to repeat this reality: long gone are the days of education as strictly knowledge acquisition.

The idea of an education model based on experiences fits well with Gharabaghi's (2018) suggestion to decentralize learning to occur across a variety of milieus while drawing on diverse wisdom and perspectives. A learning experience is certainly richer when it includes voices beyond those of designated teachers and takes place in locations more exotic than a fluorescent-lit room of rowed tables. Students seeking post-secondary programs that can deliver flexible and unique experiences also aligns with White's (2015) reflections on CYC in our modern world of super complexity. In these times of contestation, competing frameworks and uncertainty, how could any student commit to a concrete program based solely on knowledge that will likely change before the ink on the learning resource is dry?

Learning happens through experiences. We as CYC practitioners know this intrinsically. We often sculpt our relationship-based interventions as therapeutic

experiences. As CYC educators, we have been using experiences to teach practice skills for years now; practicums are primarily experiential based learning opportunities. It makes sense on so many levels that students are seeking experiences and should be provided with them to learn from. So, let's continue to hold this idea of learning occurring through experiences that are co-created and shared between students, educators, community members and young people alike. Out with the old, and in with the experiences.



## References

- Gharabaghi, K. (2018). *School's Out. Forever!* Retrieved May 8, 2018 from: <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/feb2018.pdf>
- White, J. (2015). An ethos for the times: Difference, imagination, and the unknown future in child and youth care. *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 6(4), 498.



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