

# From Relational Mapping to Being Relational

Steve Potter, Marie-Anne Bernardy-Arbuz, Claire Regan, Nick Barnes

## Introduction

From its very foundation, CAT has been an adaptive and integrative model that has drawn on learning and experience both within and beyond its therapeutic domain. It is encouraging of and embraces creativity, whilst offering a scaffold for maintaining a dialogue about what CAT offers, and indeed, what CAT should / could be. As CAT practitioners and therapists, we have often felt the need to fall back on our established tools, with “the map” perhaps being the core representation of these tools and the demarcation of our training.

But with an ever increasing awareness of our need for a sense of connection and relatedness with ourselves and those around us, then our potential for being in dialogue can be experienced much more within the process of being relational, rather than solely relying on the product of that relationship, such as the creation of a map. Mapping is a co-creative process as much as a product.

This article offers a summary of a plenary presentation that looked to demonstrate how the relationally integrated approach of CAT provides us with the space to enable dialogue, regardless of settings or contexts. The examples outlined below, and reflected on by each contributor, articulate that through the process of mapping we are creating the space for being relational. It is within this shared space, and the through opportunity from being alongside, that we enable the possibility of experiencing and being relational.

The session was designed to follow a journey, from generating an understanding of relational

mapping to working with an individual, from working within a school, to working in the community, with each section drawing how relational mapping enables us to maintain focus on the relationship, on being relational. Each of the presenters offer below a short summary of their contribution to this bigger picture.

## The Process of Relational Mapping – Steve Potter

My part of the presentation was to give an idea of the richness of the process of mapping to develop relational awareness regardless of its function as diagrammatic reformulation. In the talk, some of the key conceptual tools from CAT were described including a joined up, step by step way of linking reciprocal roles to the procedures which bind and separate them in various patterns of interaction.

Conference participants were invited to try out some of these steps since the process of conversational mapping, whether with individuals or with groups as part of reflective practice, had to be experienced and personally owned to be understood.

The benefits of the process of mapping were listed in terms of holding, tracking and re-orchestrating our social and emotional intelligence through moments of re-wording and re-storying memories and stories which may otherwise be fixed ideas or ideology. It was suggested that mapping helps us have moments, in the here and now, of memory reconsolidation through the process of hovering and shimmering between intensities of response, viewpoints, roles and emotions whether within parts

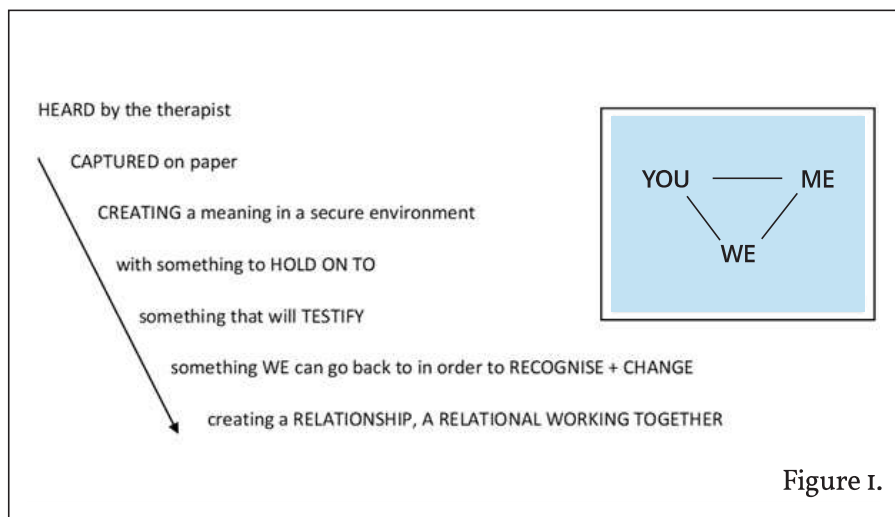
of the self or interpersonally. This raised the new idea of ‘gappiness’ drawing from Emma Smith’s recent book on Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> and the importance of using the process of mapping to acknowledge the dissociative and unformulated gaps, or ‘gappiness’, in our normal narrative awareness. One way of thinking about the process of mapping is that it is a live and changing scaffolding for crossing the gaps between what we know and don’t know about the world within and around us. It might be called a compassionate and co-creative form of raising consciousness. These themes are touched upon in much more detail in my book, *Therapy with a Map*<sup>ii</sup>.

## “I Don’t Want to Talk About it” – Marie-Anne Bernardy-Arbuz

But when it is too difficult and sometimes impossible to speak the words of suffering, the therapist can help the patient by writing down the words of inability, helplessness, anxiety, fright, terror in a noticing/noticed reciprocal role.

These words will allow the patient to “hold on to” something familiar, secure, coming in the form of a sheet of paper, recognising the spoken words and feeling recognised and heard by the listening therapist. Writing down “I do not want to talk about it” in a silencing/silenced reciprocal role can have an adverse effect, allowing the patient to continue seeing, feeling and knowing that his/her words are being held within the secure sphere of the relationship. In CAT, words SPOKEN by the patient are therefore:

When we are stuck with a patient, writing down the words we have heard, allows the patient to see the



words. He/she can feel understood and invited to go on. He/she can then find the courage to do it.

For some patients it might be the first time somebody really listens to them and they might feel heard for the first time as well. This might feel quite overwhelming. As such, the sheet of paper seems to stand for a 'feeling of being held' in a Winnicottian sense. They can feel this 'holding envelope' and even take it home. Some might feel less terrified, as 'IT' is out there, and they can look at 'It' and perhaps feel that some of the weight they carried is gone. We could in fact formulate the hypothesis that the map allows a 'materialisation' of the problem, the conflict, the pain the patient is carrying? If we acknowledge this idea, then we will have to work slowly, at the patient's rhythm and in his zone of proximal development, allowing him/her to feel secure, allowing him/her to feel confident that the secret he/she has let out is contained in the map and can be worked on.

### **Relational Approaches to Early Childhood Education: CAT Mapping and Reflective Practice – Claire Regan**

In educational settings, mapping could aid the development of relational awareness with and between educators, the children they work with, the parents of those

children and the wider cultural context. THRIECE (Teaching for Holistic, Relational and Inclusive Early Childhood Education) is a 26-month Erasmus+ funded project looking what 'quality' really means in educational settings for children aged 0-8 years. Partners in Ireland, Poland and Portugal were each responsible for one of the three pillars (Relational, Holistic, Inclusive) of what we argue constitute quality practice. The relational pillar drew theoretically on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model combined with CAT, facilitating a radically relational understanding of child development in context.

CAT mapping skills were taught to all of the staff in one primary school and two pre-schools in Carlow and Dublin, Ireland. This was followed up with 10 monthly "Relational Reflective Practice" meetings, facilitated by a qualified CAT supervisor. Staff were encouraged to map together between sessions and to bring their maps, stories, struggles and reflections to each session. The accuracy of the maps was not of primary importance. The aim was to scaffold educators to develop their relational awareness and reflective practice as higher psychological functions, using CAT maps as sign-mediated tools.

Thematic analysis of interviews conducted at the end of the

project indicated six outcomes: increased relational awareness, increased self-reflection, the creation of a "common language" for relationships, improved relationships with parents, an increased sense of psychological safety and improved staff relationships.

This research project will culminate in the publication of three online modules, available Open Source from June 2020<sup>iii</sup>. These modules are designed for use by Early Childhood Educators and Primary School Teachers as CPD, along with HEI's as part of their early childhood education and primary teacher training programmes. The "relational" module includes basic teaching on "how to" use CAT mapping.

### **Being in Dialogue at the Barbers – Nick Barnes**

An invitation to contribute to a government-led training programme aimed at supporting young men from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, who through their experience and backgrounds, were in a position to engage young people in conversations about knife crime, opened the door to a rare and quite unusual opportunity for mapping and engagement in dialogue. The group selected for the knife crime project were mostly barbers from the North London area, and my initial brief had been to do some specific training around mental health – drawing on the links between mental health, trauma and adverse childhood experiences. But what was initially meant as a one of session evolved into 6-week exploration, through mapping of self to self, self to other and other to self, all within the context of a local geography.

Our initial map started with a very literal geographical awareness and understanding of local experiences

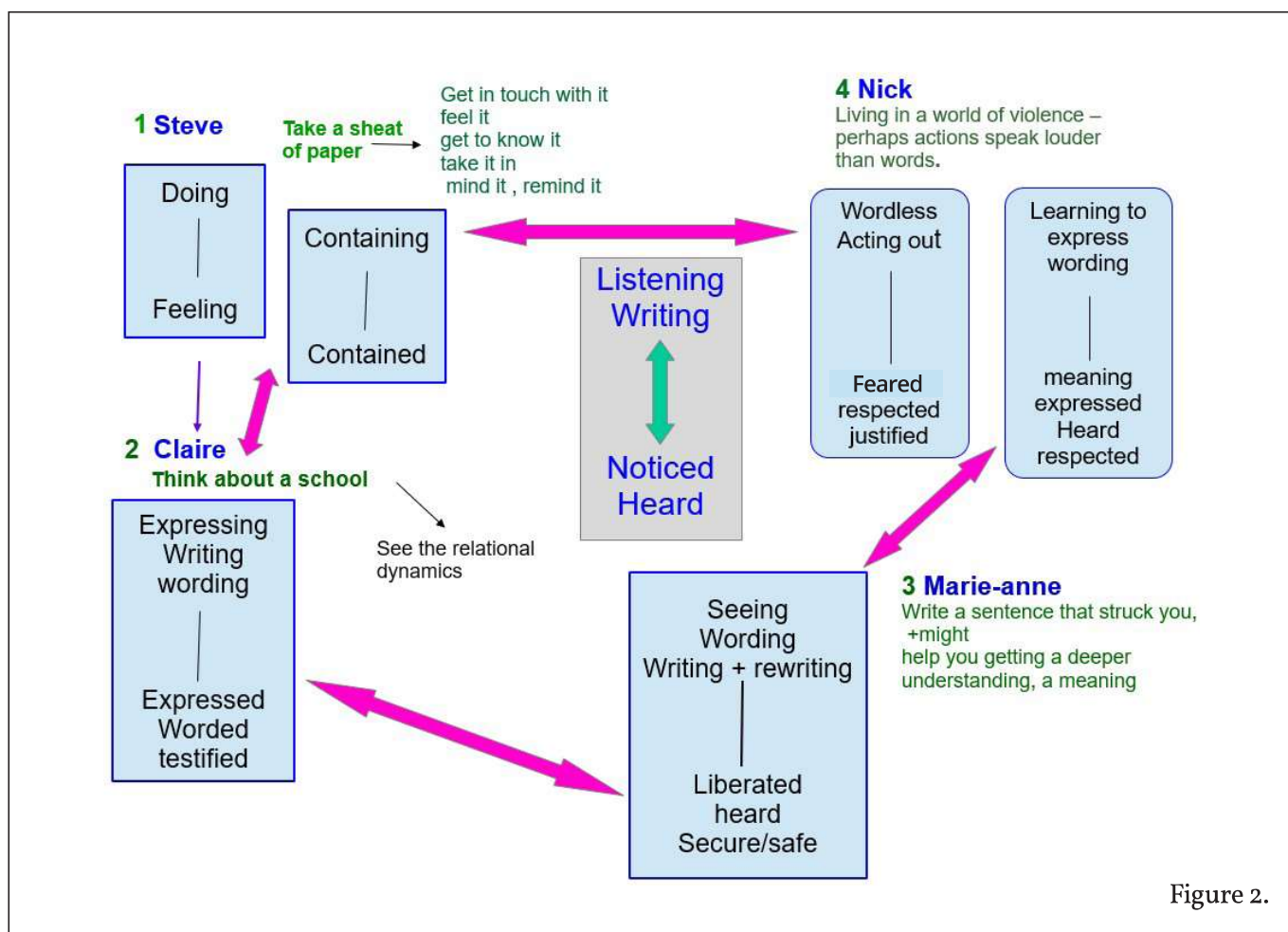


Figure 2.

of knife crime, shooting and profound loss. Time spent just focusing on the enormity of what some within our communities face on a day to day basis, and a realisation of the inequalities of experience of adversity. Too much too young, and yet, when do others take notice.

The second map therefore built on the recognition of this loss, the enormity of this loss and its impact, and gradually allowed us to create some space for the reciprocal roles. Through dialogue and discussion, through having the space that allowed for reflection on the impact of such tragic events on ourselves and on others, we began to draw a map that allowed the self to become part of the geography.

And then finally, there emerged a map that allowed the group to explore events and histories that

had happened between them – times of loss, but also times of sharing and connecting, that they felt had possibly led them to be the people they were today. This map allowed for a conversation that spoke why they had put their hands up for this programme, but also gave them the space to be honest with themselves and each other, about how much they might achieve. There was recognition of the desire, and perhaps, need to rescue; a wish to prevent “these kids from making the mistakes that I made”, whilst acknowledging the enormity of what they might be asking of a child who’s just seen and experienced far too much. But this map allowed there to be a middle ground, a place that might enable a conversation, a safe space that might speak of knives or weapons, but more importantly, may allow for a taking notice, a validation and a

recognition of being alongside – a recognition of being relational.

### Integrating this relational dialogue

Hence, from relational mapping to mapping with the barbers we offered examples of why mapping can be so rich and valuable, and that it is also a tool that creates and enables opportunities. Drawing together the central themes, this final map allowed for a recognition that at the heart of our work was a listening and writing that reciprocated with a being noticed and heard. The relational mapping was leading into a being relational.

Working together across different settings and countries to take the ideas and methods of CAT is a stimulating and challenging process. The CAT model has so much unexplored territory and its



radical social view of individual development and trauma in society is best enriched by seeing how the model develops through the eyes of different practitioners in different cultures.

### Context and Contacts

This article has evolved out of a plenary session developed for the ICATA 2019 conference<sup>iv</sup> in Ferrara, Italy. With the conference focusing on the theme of “Exploring and

Integrating Dialogues in CAT” this plenary looked to exemplify some of the core principles and qualities of CAT, namely integrative practice, collaborative and shared learning, creativity and adaptability, and embracing the spirit of internationalism.

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### Footnotes

i Emma Smith (2019) This is Shakespeare Pelican Books London

ii Therapy with a Map publication by Pavilion scheduled in July 2020.

iii [www.thrice.eu](http://www.thrice.eu)

iv <http://www.unife.it/convegno/icata2019>



## Reaching In – The Value of CAT Skills Training in Non-Statutory Community Services

Dr Karen Shannon

At the time of writing we are in week 9 of lockdown in response to the pandemic. Our human need for connection, has necessitated creative ways of reaching out remotely or from a distance. Covid-19 is allowing us to pause, connect within ourselves, and space for our natural world to heal.

In polarisation, the threat of this virus is everywhere, all the time, for everyone. It is traumatic; intensifying psychological distress. Cavernous social and economic inequalities in society are highlighted. Sadly, social problems including domestic abuse have escalated, seeing an estimated 30% increase of cases.

The Domestic Abuse Bill designed to give local authorities a legal

duty to provide refuge for victims/ children was delayed in Parliament for three years. It was not a priority.

When lockdown began victims were left in their homes with their aggressors, rising tensions and no escape. To compensate non-statutory services have reached out to victims. For example; pharmacies, an essential service during covid-19, provide safe spaces outside the home for victims to call protective services.

Women's refuges continue to provide safety and support for those fleeing abuse.

For the past 6 years I have been reaching into local charitable organisations to enhance, via CAT training and reflective practice,

relational care of vulnerable people. In particular, colleagues and I have provided three women's refuges in Merseyside with CAT skills training and reflective practice. Without multidisciplinary input and reduced resources, CAT has enabled staff to be the intervention within which to invite clients to feel safe and engage in change; to protect themselves and their children.

In this article Steph demonstrates the powerful impact of attuning to enactments within our environments, services, within ourselves and our clients. With little resources, and in difficult circumstances, having relational awareness reminds us what is possible to achieve, for the care and protection of others.