SPECIAL ISSUE
REFLECTION:
SOME LIGHT IN THE DARK

Contents

Some Light in the Dark

Jaspreet Bal

Living in a world built on systems of oppression has always been challenging. However, from where I am in Ontario, Canada, the past few months have been particularly painful. I have turned more often to loved ones in my life to check in on them and hold them close. The coping mechanisms that distance me from the news cycle have been hard to keep up, and the realities of racism and violence have been impossible to ignore. I have watched as Derek Chauvin was convicted for the murder of George Floyd, all while I was advocating to abolish the very criminal justice system that handed down this conviction (Collins, 2021). I have listened to the pain of Indigenous families as the unmarked graves of hundreds of Indigenous children on Turtle Island were discovered (CBC News, 2021). I have turned on the news to see a Muslim family in London, Ontario murdered with a car in an act of terrorism. All while the Canadian Prime Minister has refused to admit that anti-Muslim laws like Bill 21 play any role in creating and validating Islamophobia (Global News, 2021). I have read news stories sharing the indisputable fact that hate crimes against Asians are on the rise in Canada (Hernandez, 2021).

Processing this information, while maintaining the optimism required to make positive change, has been multifold. I have turned to a lot of different places to work through what is going on, including this journal. We cannot undo systems of oppression unless we know the nuances with which they operate. Knowing is the first step to creating change. For this, I turned to past issues of the RCYCP Journal. In my years of reading and now editing this journal, I have often returned to the articles in this issue; I share them with you now. The words of these authors, and their profound understanding of political relational practice has been a guiding light. I offer this curated issue to you now hoping that sitting with them and their words also illuminates your path in this dark time.

One of the most important elements for me is that the children, youth, and families we work with are not void of the politics and history that create the violent conditions of the world. As Igbu and Baccus point out, the personal relationship is at the heart of being a CYC. Similarly, Hyder, Marshall and Hillman remind us that the personal is political, and more importantly where systems of violence are lived and experienced. Our professional needs to intentionally work to address this violence. CYC is located in a specific historic and political context. When it is presented as apolitical and ahistorical it risks reinstating violent powers.

Daniel offers an easy to access framework for understanding race, racism, oppression and how it all intertwines with CYC practice.

Mackenzie, importantly, reminds us that issues of race are not for the racialized alone. This piece offers insight into the role of Whiteness in colonization and in Child and Youth Care.

Stephen and Gharabaghi take the context of North American CYC practice and turn to South Africa as a different context to offer transcendence. While CYC practice in the Global North can be constructed as orthodox practice and a counter-movement, the South African context offers ways of practicing that move beyond this binary.

This issue then moves into some specific examples and application of the conversations and theories on race. In their respective pieces, both Munroe and Edwards look at the experience of being Black in the educational setting, and Edwards looks at youth in care. Inkster and Parent look at the experiences of Indigenous girls in foster

care. Ng Man Chuen considers Asian young people and mental health concerns. Finally, Virjee wraps up the issue with a profound reflection on being a hijab-wearing Muslim CYC.

These contributions are invaluable as we seek comfort in a difficult time. The team of editors thought this issue was timely and important and thus it is open access for everyone to read. Please share the words of these authors widely and beyond our subscribed readership. Whether you are reading these again, or reading them for the first time, I echo what Hyder, Marshall, and Hillman say in their article, it is good to be uncomfortable. Go through each one of these works and observe your own feelings as you do. If you find yourself in the unfamiliar or in the uncomfortable take it as a moment of learning and reflection. Share the ideas and healing with others in your life and stay hopeful as we continue doing the very political work of relational practice.

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Critical Theoretical Approaches to Intentional Relational Praxis

Sewsen Igbu and Christine Baccus

Abstract

Relational theory has been foundational to Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice, significantly regarding entering relationships with children, youth and their families. The guiding principle is to meet children and youth where they are within their lifespace in its various forms. However, relationality as currently applied is dehistoricized and depoliticized. Thus, this paper will critique and provide implications for CYC practitioners who enter relationships with youth, their families and community through pedagogy of intentional relational praxis that is guided by critical theoretical foundations.

Keywords

Relational practice, child and youth care, CYC, pedagogy, intentional relational praxis, critical theoretical foundations.

Introduction

The social locality of the authors is critical because of the attention to the numerous intersecting identities that denotes how people are perceived by individuals and systematic institutions. The authors of this paper are two racialized women (Black and Brown) working within the field of Child and Youth Care (CYC) as well as having lived experiences of racism, immigration, sexism, and classism, which have influenced our personal and professional pedagogies and contribution towards the field.

In considering these investments, we aim to use this paper as an opportunity to critically examine current models utilized within the field, and further question practitioner intentionality and responsibilities to children, youth and their families. Also, we wish to engage ourselves as well as practitioners in a critical and action-oriented reflection to question the practice of entering into relationship and, by extension, solidarity with children and their families.

Relational practice is a defining principle of the CYC field in Canada and according to Gharabaghi (2014), is described as significant relationship between CYC practitioners and the children/youth we work with in various milieus, their families and communities (p. 7). Fundamental CYC values assert the "importance of relationship and communication that is immediate and focuses on the moment as it is occurring" (Munroe, 2017, p. 33). The emphasis on everyday instant interpersonal interactions, according to Garfat and Fulcher (2012), provides important prospects for interventions and transformation for young people.

However, the relation-centered approach, within CYC is deficient as it is frequently dehistoricized and depoliticized. Furthermore, relational practice, irrespective of the bond created and sustained, is not reciprocal, as power dynamics are sustained as these are often left either unchallenged or marginally examined through self-reflexivity. Reciprocity is important as it is identified as being an integral element of solidarity (Hoelzl, 2004, p. 46) in order to attain symmetrical acts of solidarity, which is connected to the core CYC philosophy of 'doing with, instead of for'.

Through a review of literature and document analysis, this paper will argue that the CYC field requires the utilization of critical theoretical approaches for an intentional relational praxis embedded in historical, political and structural context. Additionally, we will argue that the CYC field should integrate critical approaches to enter collaboratively into symmetrical relationship and solidarity with children, youth, families and communities. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and decolonization, as articulated by Tuck and Yang (2012) in *"Decolonization is Not a Metaphor"*, are the theoretical frameworks that will be applied to examine, critique and advocate for an action-oriented relation-centered practice within CYC.

Theoretical Frameworks

Action-oriented practices such as intersectional CRT and decolonization are of particular significance to the CYC profession. These are two separate, but recognizing commonalities, frameworks with distinct objectives. Decolonization encompasses Indigenous sovereignty, the re-appropriation of land, revitalization of culture, language, epistemologies and knowledge (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.3). It should be noted that decolonization, CRT nor other social justices are end goals but rather ongoing processes towards unsettling domination, and societal hierarchies for new futurities and humanness.

CRT centralizes and emphasizes race and racism because they are intertwined and contribute to lived experiences of oppression for peoples who have been 'othered" (Dei, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Additionally, CRT recognizes the implications of social dynamics of power situated within the historical and contemporary socio-political, economic and cultural structure of society. This is significant due to the capital embodiment of bodies based on the hierarchies of power relations (Dei, 2013, p. 5). Another tenet of CRT is the use of counter stories by Indigenous, Black and other racialized peoples to challenge the normalization of the invisibility of racism embedded within society (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). These narratives, along with critiques of liberalism (p.11), challenge the domination of Eurocentrism to further disrupt and deconstruct racist practices for the purpose of redistribution of power that is typically monopolized by the dominant group in society (Dei, 2000, p. 36).

Decolonization is frequently included in social justice praxis. However, this can be ineffectual. Tuck and Yang (2012) have highlighted that decolonization has been "superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives" (p. 2). Therefore, it is necessary to consider decolonization as a separate entity as it is a specific and literal process to address the repatriation of land concurrently to land relations and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, Tuck and Yang emphasize that decolonization must include the recognition of Indigenous self-determination, jurisdiction and self-governance.

Entering into Intentional Relational Praxis through Critical Theoretical Approaches

Contextualizing Historical Relational Power

According to Leonardo (2004), "domination is a relation of power that subjects enter into and is forged in the historical process" (p. 139). Thus, relational practices both in CYC, and other broader societal interactions, are informed by systems and ideologies that have deep historical roots and were intentionally designed for numerous reasons depending on the subject's identities and positionality. Smith (2006), in "Heteropatriarchy and The Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing", discusses the three forms of white supremacy (slavery/capitalism, genocide/colonialism and orientalism/war) in conjunction with heteropatriarchy as sites of oppression that have similarities but are also distinct forms.

So too, colonization of Indigenous peoples has been and continues to be an ongoing process to eliminate Indigenous sovereignty, spirituality, family, language, culture and relationship to land through three forms of genocide; biological, physical and cultural. Numerous policies in Canada, such as the *Indian Act and An Act for Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes*, have been enacted to assimilate Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Canadian residential schools were explicitly designed, through the removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities, to "eliminate any vestige of Aboriginality, replacing it with a Euro-Western culture, knowledge and spirituality" (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005, p. 14). Residential schools resulted in intergenerational trauma, abuse, loss of familial and community connection, love, land and the intergenerational transmission of language, culture, customs and knowledge.

Child welfare policies and involvement in Indigenous families continue to embody cultural genocide, as they further disrupt families, and impact cultural continuity and identity. Examples of these policies in contemporary times include the Sixties Scoop, the current child welfare system and the continuous underfunding of services for Indigenous children and their families.

The youth justice and education systems are further evidence of Canadian ongoing policies of colonization manifest in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth; settings that are the employment environments for the majority of Canadian CYC practitioners. Currently, there are three times the number of Indigenous children and youth in the Canadian Child Welfare system than at the peak of residential schools (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005, p. 12). Moreover, these institutions interconnect to negatively impact the lives of Indigenous, Black, racialized and marginalized youth. Indeed 57.8% of youth experiencing homelessness in Canada reported involvement with child welfare services (Nichols *et al*, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, Indigenous youth made up only eight percent of the youth population in Canada between 2016-2017 but represented forty-six percent of the young people admitted to correctional services (Malone, 2018). These studies articulate the logic of colonization, which is the disappearance of Indigenous peoples so that land ownership can be maintained by settlers (Smith, 2006; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Simultaneously, Tuck and Yang demonstrate that settler colonialism is an interwoven triangular structure of "settler-native-slave" (2012, p. 1). Settler colonialism positioned Black peoples (pluralized to emphasize that Black peoples are not a monolithic group) through enslavement as 'strangers/outsiders' to support the rationales as well as objects of colonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 11). Thus, the presence of Black peoples in Canada was 'othered' from that of British and French people who were constructed as exalted white subjects (Pon, Gosine & Phillips, 2011, p. 387). Smith (2006) labels this tenet of white supremacy as slavery/capitalism because the existence of Blackness served only to benefit the colonial state of Canada through the enslavement and rendering of Black peoples as properties (p.1). The author suggests that this logic supports capitalism because workers are commodified as well as further enabling non-Black peoples to ascribe to a racial hierarchy. As practitioners, we have observed proximity to whiteness, thus denunciation of Blackness, being utilized to avoid commodification as well as being at the bottom of the racial hierarchy by non-Black peoples.

Whilst slavery was formally eradicated in some British colonies, such as Canada in 1834 (African Canadian Legal Clinic, 2012, p. 4), the afterlife of slavery persisted to influence the lives of Black peoples by continuing to devalue Black lives and sufferings (Maynard, 2017; Sharpe, 2016). Hence, the "person underneath is imprisonable, punishable and murderable" (Maynard, 2017, p. 13) as evidenced by disproportionate numbers of Black children and youths in child welfare and other colonized institutional settings. For instance, the Black population in Toronto is 8.2% but 41% of Black children and youth are under the care of the Children's Aid Society (Contenta, S., 2015). Moreover, intersectionality is significant as these pillars are based on and sustain white heteropatriarchy; thus, there are diverse manifestations of colonization and racism depending on individual identities.

From this brief overview it is clear that CYC practitioners – many of whom work in the justice, health social service and educational institutional settings most impacted by the historical context just described - must be fully aware of its impact. A vital inquiry for us as practitioners is for the profession of CYC to more clearly articulate how we practice and honour an ethical approach that seems to be grounded within historical and contemporary circumstances that are systemically anti-Black, racist, colonial and based on hierarchical power dynamics. A significant process is a CYC practice that builds strategies of resistance that simultaneously recognizes CYC complicity in the subjugation of others so that practitioner activism does not continue to marginalize people.

Mapping Whiteness within CYC

An intentional relational CYC praxis must call on the profession and practitioners to name and discuss white heteropatriarchal supremacy, and its numerous manifestations, within institutions. White supremacy is guided by the concept of whiteness, which is defined by Ruth Frankenberg (1994) as "a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming "whiteness" displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed state that is itself an effect of its domination" (p. 6). This is important because the CYC field originated as a 'helping' profession for individuals, families and communities that

historically and contemporarily have been racialized and marginalized. "Help" has often served as a way to control and seek compliance (Saraceno, 2012, p. 256). In the context of relationships, we have observed that whiteness is significant in the CYC profession. In many sectors that we engage children and youth, it is predominantly dominated by white bodies, epistemologies and values, particularly in positions of authority such as in management or in academia.

For instance, Kiaras Gharabaghi (2017), in "Why Are We So White?", recognizes this issue as well when he states "The professional infrastructure of the field is principally white, including almost all those who contribute to professional associations, who teach at post-secondary institutions (thankfully there are some exceptions in this context), and who make policy decisions that affect the ongoing development of the field" (p. 6-7). Additionally, our collective personal, educational and frontline work experiences produced encounters of domination and when labeled to our white counterparts, we were met with resistance, denial and discomfort. Significantly, within the educational settings formal and informal curriculum is continuously used to reproduce ethnocentric racism. The concept of 'ally' has become a term employed to define CYC practitioner relationships (relations with each other, with children/youth, families and communities) but when called into action, ally-ship has rarely, if at all, been exercised critically or without causing further harm.

Thus, historical and contemporary CYC relational practices that do not recognize the individual and structural influence of whiteness are inherently problematic and harmful. These practices distance whiteness from systems of power and preserve white supremacy. For the purposes of entering into relationships, whiteness must be identified as a source root of racism to highlight the ways in which racism "shapes white people's lives and identifies in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 6). Recognizing how whiteness situates itself in the CYC profession requires that relation practice be grounded in theories and praxis that are critically action oriented and has the lenses of CRT and decolonization. CYC relational practice must acknowledge the adulterated nature of traditional therapeutic relationships that are most often devoid of historical and contemporary contexts and intentions to

continuously produce injustices (De Finney, Little, Skott-Myhre & Gharabaghi, 2012, p. 139). As youth care practitioners that navigate many working environments with our white counterparts, we recognize that we had questions that are perhaps vital to our practice: whose benefits and comforts do current therapeutic relationships support, therefore who is harmed? How are privileged white bodies held accountable when we practice from a colonial eurocentric model? How is the CYC profession going to be responsible to practice an intentional and theoretical relational praxis that is not systemically harmful and destructive? How do we as practitioners actively work to decolonize ourselves, our profession, and our relational practice as ongoing process?

Deconstructing the Core of CYC Relational Practice

Relation-Centered Practice

The concept of CYC relational practice begins with the understanding that interpersonal connections are co-created between the child, youth and/or families and practitioners to produce teachable moments to enrich the development of children and their families (Garfat, 2003). Such relationships are built upon "empathy, trust, security, compassion and sympathy" (Gharabaghi, 2011, p. 68). Relational practice grew from the centralization of the self; enabling CYC practitioners to being present in the moment and within relationships, intentional and aware of boundaries. This shifted CYC relational dynamics from 'having relationships' to 'being in relationships' within the CYC profession (Gharabaghi, 2011, p. 68).

Critique of Relational-Centered Practice

Self-reflexivity is a central feature of CYC practice and influences how CYC practitioners should analyze and critique privileges/self-location. Garfat's concept of 'checking in' with the self and monitoring self-presentation demonstrates the importance of reflexivity as the ongoing process of active self-awareness within relationships and throughout interventions.

Self-reflexivity begins with 'checking in' with self - a continuous process of active self-awareness throughout intervention (Garfat, 2003). Checking in enables the CYC practitioner to be aware and reflective of several factors, such as potential internal cause of events, why certain interventions were chosen, what was and was not done accurately and what could be done next time. Thus, 'checking in with self' requires the CYC practitioner to be mindful of the present while also being future oriented in order to consider alternative courses of action. The monitoring of self-presentation, which is related to 'checking in', is another tenet of self-reflexivity. In this process, the CYC practitioner must constantly be mindful of how they are externally presenting themselves to those within the space, which subsequently impacts relationships as well as potential interventions (Garfat, 2003). A third form of CYC self-reflexivity is the process of reflection itself. This can include the contemplation of and writing about privileges, oppressions, intersecting identities and taking time to consider how those connect to individual CYC practice. Although these concepts are central to CYC theory, and evident in most CYC literature, they can both – in theory and practice – be problematic.

The most significant of these problems is with the use and centralization of the self. It is understood that professionals are expected to employ self-reflection to recenter themselves as the subject. This orientation of self as centre denies children and families subjectivity as they are relegated to positions of simply bearing witnesses to events. Moreover, children and youth are often placed into the position of authenticating the practitioner's experiential growth. Andrea Smith articulates this concept, in *"Unsettling the Privilege of Reflectivity"* (2013), by emphasizing those reflections of privilege pivots the practitioner as "confessor" (p. 267) in a political act rather than addressing the structures and systems in place that reinforce and maintain their privileges. Through the continuous objectivity of the child, youth and their families, practitioners are not only validated but they also negate children and youth's agency - a constant act of marginalization.

Applying CRT to the practice of self-reflexivity implies that this practice should facilitate an action-oriented praxis by connecting self and practice to structures of domination and the politicizing historical context of contemporary injustices. Smith

(2013) highlights that transformations can only occur when reflective practice is simultaneous with social and political revolution. Leonardo (2004) supports this view, suggesting that discourses on privileges invisibles historical circumstances, obscures institutional domination and negates the actions of those with power and privilege (p. 138). Thus, the innocence of whiteness and individualizing that is often connected to dialogue of privilege needs to be eliminated to be understand the structural origins, and maintenance, of colonization, anti-Blackness, racism, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of isms.

The Discourse on 'Helping'

Traditional CYC relational practice habitually operates from the stance of the CYC practitioner being a 'helper' and through a damage-based lens. Tuck argues this as functioning "benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (2009, p. 413). Thus, the self as a helper maintains a central emphasis within CYC practice that tends to focus on the micro and meso systems within the ecological model. The result is a CYC outlook that often views the family structure and communal lifespace as pathological and deficient while the exo and macro systems are considered to be beyond the scope of CYC practice. The outcome is that current CYC relational practices are often contingent on "apolitical, uncritical and color-blind" relationships (Loiselle, De Finney, Khanna & Corcoran, 2012, p. 186) that invalidate the complex identities and lives of youth. Also, messy or complicated dialogue and intentionality as well as ethically reparative relationships are evaded.

The pathologizing of children built on a deficit model is in fact in direct contrast to the types of relationship from which many children and youth could most benefit. What are required are relationships outside of psychological labels, reasoning and descriptions based on Eurocentrism normative. Loiselle *et al*, (2012) observes that children and youth desire supporting relationships that are critical of social structures and utilize transformative language that itself enables "radical re-imaginings": ones where children's identities are based on self-representations (p. 185). Such relationships require a dialogue that examines oppressive structures apparent within the life of the child, utilize

critical theory and politicized practice to challenge and prepare youth to develop strategies for overcoming and challenging systemic barriers (p. 187). Understanding self-reflexivity and relational practice as political, critical and socially engrossed generates and sustains relationships that transcend meeting basic needs to 'survivance' –as articulated by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor.

Vizenor demands an active survivance, which encourages Indigenous peoples to move beyond "basic survival in the fact of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (Loiselle *et al*, 2012. p. 201). Although addressing immediate needs is critical, Vizenor emphasizes the importance of reviving and thriving. In contrast, traditional CYC relational practice continuously individualizes relationships, thus creating and sustaining a circular causality in which practices are prescriptive, conforming children/youth to societal norms and forcing adaptation to mere existences.

CYC relational practice should be expanded to be political and critical theory motivated so practitioners could engage in ways that challenge and disrupt the flames that cause inequities instead of extinguishing them. CYC relational practice should disentangle from survivance and aim towards resistance and renewal, both action oriented and future advancing. Futurity for Indigenous, Black, racialized and marginalized individuals and communities is transformative because it disrupts the discourse and embodiment of bare lives, thus inevitably and logically lost (Razack, 2011, p. 353). Consider for instance, in our personal and professional journey, CYC literature and teaching constructing Indigenous peoples in past terms, constantly disappearing, in ways that continue to rationalize the ongoing structure of colonization and "successors to land, Indigenous culture, spirituality" (Smith, 2006, p. 2). Hence, survivance, political and social engagement together with the utilization of critical theory has significant potentiality for relation centred practice.

Move to Innocence with CYC Profession

Another action-oriented process is the removal of the "move to innocence" by CYC professionals and the field. Tuck and Yang (2012) delineate these moves as methods of deflection or divergence employed by settlers to relieve themselves of feelings of guilt

and/or responsibility, further masking their ownership of land and power (p.21). CYC profession's 'moves to innocence' is through the continual fixation on critical consciousness that lacks action as well as language and representation of Indigenous as well as Black, racialized and marginalized children/youth, families and communities as damaged and pathological. Furthermore, innocence is maintained through cultural appropriation of Indigenous cultures, languages and knowledge, as well as their struggles, by connecting colonization to other forms of oppression as well as 'performance' by non-Indigenous bodies. Lastly, obscuring colonization by engaging in multicultural frameworks and misrecognizing contemporary forms of colonization, which is also about material redressing, within the numerous settings that CYCs are situated distances practitioners from their colonial accountability. Thus, decolonization by CYC practitioners and the field needs to be non-metaphoric and refuse to be complicit in the maintenance of "settler futurity" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) through active solidarity in repatriation of land and sovereignty.

Conclusion

Feminist and anti-racist scholar, and activist, bell hooks, declared

> I came to theory because I was hurting ... I came to
> theory desperate, wanting to comprehend what was
> happening around and within me. Most importantly,
> I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory,
> then, a location for healing" (Loiselle *et al*, 2012, p. 201).

hooks account is indispensable to the profession of CYC because it addresses how CYC practice is entangled both individually and systemically in the lives of minoritized populations (Saraceno, 2012). Current relational praxis therefore is an inadequate response to address the root causes of injustices and violence as it is unsatisfactory and a systemically privileged way of being with youth, families and their communities.

To be effective, intentional relational practices must recognize and tackle the issues relevant to the lived experiences of youth, their families and communities. To do this, CYC practice must critically engage and incorporate historical and contemporary ideologies as well as acknowledge institutional racism and on-going colonial practices. CYC practitioners must embody a substantial tenet of decolonization and Critical Race Theory activism: being action oriented especially in solidarity with Indigenous, Black, racialized and marginalized children/youth, families and communities. CYC education, literature, professional structure and core principles of practice must include critical theories such decolonization, Critical Race Feminism, Disability and Queer theories, Afro and Indigenous futurism, and intersectionality in order to engage the multiple identities of children, youth and families we work alongside.

We conclude this paper with questions for both discussion and action. How do we unpack or address our privileges for a "continual examination of politics" especially since politics is intimately connected to our own personal history (Combahee River Collective, 1997)? Can we have a CYC practice that is transformative and claims to engage in decolonization (which includes repatriation of land) and social justice by continuing to advocate for a state and form of governance that is continuously invested in the colonization of Indigenous peoples as well as the oppression of racialized and marginalized communities? Where does the profession choose to invest in and disinvest from and what are the implications? Who are we in relation with if our practices and actions continuously reinforce structures of power thus continuing the marginalization of children, youth, families and communities? What do acts that seek legitimacy from a colonial state through endeavours to professionalize mean for Indigenous, Black and other marginalized groups as their oppression is connected and maintained through systemic organizational structures built on colonial violence? How would our relational practice transform if we operated from a new theory of humanness that does not intentionally exclude IBPOC, LGBTQ, differently abled bodies and 'Othered' individuals/groups?

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Politicizing CYC: An Integral Aspect of Relational Practice

Shadan Hyder, Nancy Marshall and Matty Hillman

Introduction

Child and Youth Care (CYC) is sometimes referred to as an emerging field. With fewer years of documented practice and a substantially smaller canon of foundational literature compared to some allied professions (i.e., education, social work, and nursing), CYC can be considered actively developing its values and practices. As such, it is vital that CYC practitioners are aware of trends emerging within the field and cognizant of current socio-political events both on a local and global scale. White (2015) has used the term "supercomplex" – referring to the contested and competing truths of our times – to describe the multiple and conflicting ideas about CYC practice, theory and research. Thus, CYC as a field of study and practice is both impacted by and contributes to the socio-political climate within which we live.

This paper aims to contribute to a discussion on a trend noted by us, the authors, and others at CYC gatherings over the last few years: an interest in, and discomfort with, conversations that consider the political nature of caring for children, youth and families. We query whether this is, in part, representative of a larger trend of "CYC fragility" (See: Vachon, 2018) that risks preventing difficult but necessary discussions about disrupting colonial ways of practice, or whether it is representative of genuine concern that politics can impede relational CYC.

In this paper, we theoretically ground ourselves with many established thinkers in our field. We are inspired by Saraceno's (2012) cartographies identifying CYC as deeply embedded in dominant Western ontology and rooted in white coloniality and masculinity.

We align with those that have called for a challenging of the homogeneity of whiteness in our field (Gharabaghi, 2017) as well as those who remind us that CYC is deeply embedded within a white supremacist culture and we (as a field and as individuals) need to be held accountable to this in real and material ways (Skott-Myhre, 2017). We support the words, ideas and actions of those working to "apply a critical social justice analysis in their engagement with children, youth, families and communities" (de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011, p. 361) and those that advocate for socially just and accountable pedagogies (Freire, 1970).

Together, we have mused over many other important conversations and writings in our field of late: Bal (2016); Batasar-Johnie (2017); Daniel (2018); Igbu and Baccus (2018); Loiselle, de Finney, Khanna & Cocoran (2012) and Munroe (2016).These are but a few among many others – including those brilliant practitioners who face barriers to engaging in CYC conversations and submitting publications. Together, this literature shares an important theme in the care of young people – CYC as an anti-oppressive practice that encompasses a recognition of children's rights and the impacts of systemic barriers both on young people and on practitioners.

We argue a clear position: a politicized CYC is an integral aspect of relational practice. Drawing on the seminal feminist maxim, 'the personal is political', we understand that very little in our current hyper-connected, divisive and opinionated world is apolitical. Further, we are well aware that the root of inequalities and suffering within our communities is often systemic in nature. For a topical example, one needs to look no further than the dramatic and deeply hurtful cuts to youth programming and education implemented by the Ontario Conservative government. Not only does political decision-making impact funding and policy, but trends in CYC practice, as well as recognition of the field, fluctuate in response to the political winds of the moment. In short, we understand that CYC is at once shaped by politics as it is a contributor to the political landscape of our times.

We begin by introducing our own practices, privilege and social locations. We follow with a discussion on some intriguing CYC questions that may generate more insight into an existing ideological divide within our field. Shadan continues the discussion through

her journey as a CYC practitioner living on the margins. We conclude with a discussion on the possibilities a politicalized CYC practice brings.

Self and Social Location

We are diverse in our identities, experiences and CYC practice domains. We are deeply invested in CYC and regularly contribute to the development of the field through our practice, writing and research. We also share similar values and hopes for the future of CYC. We desire to see a CYC practice that is inclusive, diversely represented, and humble in nature. One that acknowledges its current and historical legacy of oppression. One that welcomes new voices to the discussion and decenters the privilege granted by age, whiteness, western epistemologies and colonial and capitalistic practices.

We hope, as a field, we can let our vulnerabilities take the lead in critical self-growth. We personally challenge ourselves to be open to the possibilities that what we knew in the past may no longer be relevant in the present. This takes vulnerability and courage. It is rarely a comfortable or easy path, yet it is one we believe to be an integral aspect to the growth of an ethical (and political) relational practice.

Situating the Authors

We understand that situating ourselves is a necessary point of departure for any socio-political discussions. Matty is a white, cis-gendered male, able-bodied, with middle class, colonial settler roots. Similarly, Nancy is a white cis-gendered, able-bodied female settler with roots from Ireland, Scotland and Britain. In contrast, Shadan identifies as an Indian-Canadian settler, second generation immigrant, womxn[1], queer, and able-bodied. As the white authors in this piece, Matty and Nancy recognize the power structures within the field created by white colonialism and how they participate in these structures through the acceptance of opportunities afforded to them. As the Brown author within

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[1] The spelling of "womxn" is intentional: "... in order to recognize the agency of womxn, individually and collectively, and to challenge the notion that womxn are necessarily defined through their relation to men. This spelling is intended to honor anyone who has ever, ever will, or currently identifies as a womxn." (University of California, 2018)

this piece, Shadan recognizes the privileges that accompany being perceived as a Model Minority (Lee, Wong, & Alvarez, 2009) due to their identification as South Asian within the Canadian/North American context.

Matty. Undoubtedly my social location has shaped my personal experiences and professional trajectory. As a white, cis, able-bodied man with middle class, settler, colonial roots, I have been afforded opportunities and spared barriers that others, including my co-authors have not. I still remember the day my college CYC instructor told me that men were needed in the field and I could go far, even teach at the college one day. Seven years later, I began teaching there and that inspirational mentor is now my colleague.

In grad school, I became interested in the experiences of other men employed in predominantly female occupied fields. I learned that men employed in predominantly female professions have been said to ride a glass elevator as opposed to bumping into a glass ceiling. This has been explicated as: men enjoying preference in hiring, a close mentorship from other men in the profession, encouragement to move up in position, and being more likely to have their writing published (McPhail, 2004).

I have mentored several nascent male student practitioners, most of whom now have stable and permanent positions in our region. In my anti-violence work, delivering bystander training, I will often speak about the responsibility that men have to interrupt violence in any form, and educate other men about the impacts of their words and actions. Through examples from my own life, I focus on the ubiquity of misogyny in Western culture, as well as how systems and structures (like college), are constructed primarily with privileged individuals' needs in mind.

More recently, I have begun meeting regularly with other white CYC scholars to discuss our privilege as it relates to our teaching practices (Hillman, White, Dellebuur O'Connor, 2019, in press). As white scholars who possess a substantial degree of privilege through our social locations and positions in post-secondary education, we recognize that our attempts to 'be good white allies', while honourably intentioned, are sometimes fraught with missteps and errors. In order to keep our obligation to bring

social justice into our classrooms, we have made a commitment to come together in solidarity (through virtual meetings) to support, confront and sometimes challenge each other in our developing pedagogies and classroom practices (Hillman, White, Dellebuur O'Connor, 2019, in press).

Nancy. Skott-Myhre (2017) discovered that marginalized youth (in the care of white, able-bodied and cis-gendered practitioners) "… may well see our very existence in their lives as painful" (p. 17). I resonate with this statement in several ways. First, I resonate with DiAngelo's (2018) concept of absorbing prejudice: "Our prejudices tend to be shared because we swim in the same cultural water and absorb the same messages" (p. 19). I must admit I have absorbed my fair share of these messages while growing up in a white, middle-class suburban town. I was hardly sheltered from discrimination against disabled folx[2], queer folx, and people of colour. As a result, I have spent more than half my life participating in these discriminations. Specifically, my participation has taken the form of micro-aggressions. Vachon (2018) describes micro-aggressions as, "…interminable acts of violence that people in positions of privilege commit, often non-consciously, towards minoritized others. 'Little' moments that happen, daily, hourly, endlessly." (p. 15). Some may view "violence" as too harsh a word. However, these acts can be considered examples of *invisible* violence, such as cultural violence (fear, dismissiveness, pity, negative perceptions), and structural violence (unequal access, poverty, institutionalization, punishment) (Galtung, 1990).

I am not an autistic person of colour as are many students who I have supported during my career. Unfortunately, my college training did not prepare me for the authenticity I would need to engage in this relational work (Munroe, 2016). Instead, I spent years doing behavior analytic charts to justify reward and consequence programs. I was often praised by my colleagues and administration for all my hard work and supposed effectiveness. Was I relational with students? Of course. Did we have lots of fun together? Sure. The problem with this relational approach was that I simultaneously

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[2] The spelling of folx is also intentional: "In some languages, 'folks' is a gendered noun, so using "folx" is a way to include people of all genders, especially non-binary genders." (Because I Am Human, n.d.)

became absorbed in the microcosmic structure of a school system that mirrored the systemic oppressions within larger society. I was relational without recognition of power. My creative reward programs (I tried to make them fun!) accomplished little more than blaming and questioning youth behaviour without looking at injustices that got them there (Munroe, 2016). This is a micro-aggression that practitioners within my social location may commit 'non-consciously'.

Thankfully, I learned to listen and reflect on the advocacy from my many colleagues and students on the margins. I am extremely grateful for this education as it has transformed my practice. I recognize that this too, is a form of structural violence. The time and effort it takes to educate those of us who have been absorbed in the other side of prejudices our whole lives cannot be taken lightly. It takes courage, blood, sweat and tears – and it is grossly unfair that they bear the burden of this work. I understand how the young people in my care may, at times, see my 'very existence in their lives as painful'. How can they trust I will help break these cycles of violence when I have not experienced them myself?

Shadan. Some may be surprised that I am writing in this section as a person of colour. However, it is important to acknowledge and recognize that those of us of colour have benefitted from immense social justice advocacy accomplished by Black and Indigenous folx as well as the inequity they have and continue to experience.

I was raised in low-income neighbourhoods. However, the messaging that I received from media, family and community members was, as I know it now, anti-Black racism. These messages were internalized as I was ill equipped to challenge my biases due to my education, resources and the reality that I was struggling just to survive.

It wasn't until college, when I was willing and able to learn about the 'true' history of North America – slavery, colonialism, the perpetuation of the two in more covert ways, and the understanding that the level of risk navigating this system is dependent on the colour of one's skin. This education was lacking, or rather withheld, in my primary, and in all honesty, post-secondary education. It thus reinforced my problematic perceptions. This is not to suggest that I am now free of biases or perpetrating harm, nor will that ever be

the case as I continue to live in a system fraught with problematic messaging. However, my intent is to minimize the harm I cause as much as possible through continued education, self-reflection and humility to critical feedback.

I know that I am not the only one within my community that has received problematic messaging. The need to do internal community work is necessary and evident by those of us doing equity work. However, due to current power dynamics and lack of safe spaces for marginalized communities, the need to address systemic issues supersedes internal community healing and education.

The Political Questioning of our Practice

Part of the impetus for this paper stemmed from a question posed during the closing plenary of a recent conference in Ireland. The question posed to the diverse group of CYC leaders (and the audience) was: "In your jurisdiction, do you think the field of Child and Youth Care is over politicalized? For example, do you think that children are being used to progress a political agenda?" The responses from the panel members were varied. Initially, there was some agreement that an overly political lens can de-center focus from children and youth, or worse, exploit them for political gain. Others disagreed and expressed sentiments that structural change is required to improve the lives of children and youth. We see validity in both views.

Yet, for us, the very occurrence of this question was troubling. Here we were at an international conference which featured some big names in foundational CYC. And, as a group of practitioners invested in the justice of our work, we wondered how could the pursuit of political change be called into question? We are curious because, as we see it, no professional field within the human or social services field can advance its' effective practice of caring for people without a clear and determined focus on politics. There is a real danger in shying away from politics when young people depend on us to break down systemic barriers to their well-being. Not only do they depend on this, they have clearly asked us to *increase* the political agenda in their care and to stop protecting them from the critical language of politics that influence their lives (Loiselle et al., 2012).

The Ideological Divide

> The goal of therapy should never be to help people adjust to
> oppression – *Carmen Cool*

We are aware that this is not a new discussion within CYC and there is a well-documented history of disagreement on fundamental elements of CYC practice and education (Mann-Feder, Scott, & Hardy, 2017). This schism is made visible when some claim that the inclusion of critical and post theories somehow takes away from practice-based approaches (Mann-Feder et al., 2017), while others insist a politicalized practice is absolutely necessary in their work (Loiselle et al., 2012). As a young field in search of identity, we seem to grapple with how to engage with politics. Students have noted a deficiency in critical analysis of systemic injustice within our education (Igbu & Baccus, 2018; Munroe, 2016). Others have noted a tension with relating political themes to professionalizing our practice:

> Partially because CYC is an emerging profession and still seeking
> some of the aspects of power and recognition held by other
> helping professions, critical and postmodern views are sometimes
> seen as threatening to the professionalization process. Although
> this concern is understandable, we believe that a failure to engage
> with critical perspectives is also potentially problematic for the
> profession. *(Pence & White, 2011, p.xxvi)*

Perhaps, in some jurisdictions, we have not developed enough as a field to agree on the incorporation of critical perspectives in CYC practice. In recent years, we have noticed this discussed in seminal literature, conferences, classrooms, and social media. Yet, in several academic and theoretical discourses of CYC, concepts remain centered around the differences between relationship-based practice (our roots) and relational practice (our present and future) (*for a quick refresher on these particular developments see:

Gharabaghi, 2019). While these latter discussions are valuable, they have historically centered the white, male perspective in North America. Not surprisingly, given the rise in social justice perspectives and critical inquiries globally, emerging practitioners "…seek to make room for alternative voices in the narrow canon of Child and Youth Care (CYC) practice and theory" (Loiselle, et al., 2012, p. 179). Luckily, open forum platforms such as *CYC-Net* and *CYC International Community* (on Facebook), make room for these discussions to happen more freely.

In 2010, the question: "Why are people speaking about the field in ways I don't understand?" sparked a lengthy debate (and several publications) about the usefulness of academic jargon that unpacks critical theory and systemic oppression in relational practice (Loiselle, et al., 2012). Similarly, Marshall (2018) spurred a debate around how a practitioner's middle- and upper-class privilege may hamper best outcomes for marginalized young people. Soon after, Jones (2018) asked if there was a "critique" of relational practice (in which indeed there are excellent ones: see Daniel, 2018; Igbu & Baccus, 2018; Munroe, 2016).

We value these conversations as they critique and debate our work in ways that allow for transformation. They reveal that while our focus on interpersonal moments of relational care is valuable and important (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012), it remains "dehistoricized and depoliticized" (Igbu & Baccus, 2018, p. 57). Further, they suggest that our field can benefit from extending beyond critically unchallenged foundations of interpersonal work, such as the historically narrow focus on developmental psychology (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2011).

With these insights, perhaps we can understand how "little moments" can be both micro-aggressive (Vachon, 2018) and relational at the *same time*. We can see them as "critical practice moments" that add to the authenticity of CYC practice (Loiselle, et al., 2012, p. 180). In this way, perhaps these discussions become not so much a critique of relational practice, but rather a desire to expand relational practice to include critical perspectives of systemic injustice.

In our view, a relational approach without challenging power structures will accomplish little more than "helping people adjust to their oppression" (Cool, 2018). We

ponder possibilities of practice in which youth are not necessarily the first target for change. We imagine a system, and how we operate as practitioners within that system, as a crucial first target of change. We envision a united field committed to necessary practical political action with the aim of holistic and genuine care.

Practicing from the Margins

As we discuss the ideological divide and the necessity of a political lens, we must begin utilizing that lens on our own field. As mentioned, there have been numerous valuable critiques regarding CYC, specifically around the lack of diversity (Bal, 2016; Batasar-Johnie, 2017; Daniel, 2018; Munroe, 2016), to which I would like to add my own experience. My name is Shadan Hyder (pronouns: She/Her/They/Them), and in colonial spaces, my numerous intersecting identities (i.e. being a womxn, person of colour, and queer), are often viewed as offensive and/or valueless. This messaging has been reinforced not only in my daily life, but throughout my CYC career.

I would like to begin by first discussing anti-oppressive practice (AOP), which is the critical examination and awareness at the micro- and macro- levels of the inherent abuse of power in relation to the inequities that impact marginalized individuals and communities. As a practice, it is about actively mitigating the power imbalances within the social structures (Burke & Harrison, 1998). The very fact that we have begun employing anti-oppressive practices as a foundation in CYC is to acknowledge the politically influenced nature of our work. How could we not, when the majority of those we work with are living on the margins of a society that is attempting to expel them for not fitting in to the hegemony? A majority of CYC roles are within institutional settings that are inherently oppressive, discriminatory and racist (The John Howard Society of Canada [TJHS], 2017; Gunn, 2016; Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], n.d; Gosine & Pon, 2011). This means that in order for CYC practitioners to effectively provide AOP, we must be critically aware and actively minimize the institutional barriers to wellness for those we serve and work with. Not only is anti-oppressive practice meant to mitigate the power differential for the young people and communities we work with, but for our colleagues living on the margins as well.

In my six-year CYC educational journey, not once was I represented at the front of the room by a professor. At the time of my diploma and bachelor's degree education, there was no tenure professor of colour, though I'm happy to say I have seen some intentional changes since. Within the classroom, the required readings were generally always by white authors. As Freire (1970) noted, "Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly directed" (Freire, 1970, p. 94). While I am not suggesting that all CYC education fails to consider the young people for whom it is intended, Freire's observation is often accurate within the structurally unequal societies our programs exist. The lack of inclusion of IBPOC (Indigenous, Black and People of Colour) and marginalized authors is a lack of those perspectives necessary for practitioners to increase their critical thinking. My hope is to see diverse authors in future syllabi represent the diversity within the field and of the young people and communities we work with.

In addition, when I or my IBPOC peers raised the issue of race in and outside of class, it was either quickly dismissed or responded to with defensiveness – both of which are regular micro-aggressions perpetrated by professors and students alike. My experiences within CYC academia have also been noted by other IBPOC scholars (notably Batasar-Johnie, 2017; Igbu & Baccus, 2018; Munroe, 2016). The unchallenged micro-aggressions faced by both students and professors was shocking, only because I naively hoped for better from those striving to be, and who are already part of the human/social services field. The reality, however, was that the micro-aggressions were actually exacerbated due to the elitist space that is academia.

Furthermore, I have been working in the CYC field for approximately 11 years and have yet to have a supervisor or manager that is anything other than white, cis-gendered and able-bodied. Within this time period, I have applied to numerous positions. However, when seeking feedback for why I was not provided the opportunity for an interview or hired for supervisory positions, the answer was always the same – 'the other candidate had more experience'. The thing was, when these 'more experienced' people were hired,

it was left to me to train and support them in their new position. I quickly realized that it was not my experience that was a barrier to my professional growth, but my skin colour (For further discussion on this see: Gosine & Pon, 2011).

As a racialized womxn navigating the CYC field, the high level of racism and discrimination that I, and my fellow colleagues living on the margins, face from peers within the field is astonishing. As Vachon (2018) mentions, the majority of the work in the area of anti-racism, anti-oppressive frameworks and other areas of equity are facilitated by IBPOC and marginalized folx. The question that comes to mind in response to the question of our field being "too politicized" is whether this is a pushback because of *who* the people doing the equity work are?

The difference in ideologies within the field has become apparent as questions like this are continuously arising within CYC platforms with people on both sides of the 'argument'. This is indicative of the larger political colour-blind stance Canada takes. However, as noted in the revised 25 Characteristics, a core element of our work includes "partnering with young people to challenge the world as it is and as it impacts them in particular" (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi & Fulcher, 2018, p. 22). Daniel (2018) further states,

> CYC practitioners cannot determine which aspects of people's worlds they engage with and which ones are deemed to be of limited relevance given that these identity locations can impact on people's experience of the world and can influence their reactions to situations. *(p.34)*

It is unethical to refrain from including politics within our work with youth and families and a perpetuation of the colonial system we live in. To pull and center those living on the margins benefits everyone.

A Political CYC: Conclusions and Implications for Practice

As evidenced in our opinions and experiences throughout this discussion, CYC is political by nature. It is political in the same way that filling your automobile with fossil fuels in the face of a climate change crisis, is a political act; in the same way that including the truths about residential schools in curriculum is political through the awareness it creates; and in the same way acknowledging the land and its original peoples is often a political statement. CYC is political because there is very little in this world that is not.

Supporting children, youth and families to live, heal and thrive in today's divisive, materialistic, hyper-connected and individualized world will always require the consideration of policy. International charters such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, are important foundations to the work. National policies such as the *Indian Act* continue to contribute to the disproportionate abuse and suffering Indigenous children and families experience. Provincial and regional budgetary decisions that affect service delivery, clients' experiences and workers' longevity will always matter.

Practicing CYC without consideration of the socio-political climate is harmful. Each of our individual narratives provides examples of how our practices are shaped by the socio-political climate of our time, place and identity. Moreover, we identify ways that a non-politicized praxis has contributed to the oppression of youth in our care, and in the case of marginalized colleagues such as Shadan, oppression in the workplace and post-secondary classroom.

A politicized CYC practice can be difficult. As a field, it requires reflection on our history of embedded whiteness and as such, a practice that undoubtedly is impacted by race and racism (Gharabaghi, 2017). As individuals, it requires a great deal of reflection on ourselves and the, often unnamed, privileges we have been afforded by our education, positions, and bodies. However, a political CYC praxis involves *doing*, in addition to knowing and being. Skott-Myhre (2005) distinguishes between colonial youth work and radical youth work as joining the resistance for change rather than dwelling within the comfort of power and privilege.

Many also agree that a political CYC practice and education can be creative, joyful and supportive of the development of the field (White, Kouri & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017). As Pence and White (2011) noted, "Ultimately, we want to showcase the exciting and creative work being pursued by an emerging generation of future CYC leaders as well as to recognize the expanded possibilities for pedagogy, policy, and practice that these ways of thinking open up." (p. xvii). A strong example is Shadan's experiences utilizing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model to explore the impacts of IBPOC-specific therapeutic groups for male-identified young people (Diego, et al., 2019, in preparation). As our current system thrives on evidence-based practice, push for change requires a focus on quality research, and this research can utilize a creative relational practice model to impact systemic change alongside young people. Shadan's research embodied 'doing with' on an academic level by enabling action for system change through the voices of those directly involved and impacted (for further information on PAR see Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006). The politically informed methodology allowed for relationship building within the otherwise intimidating research process. Throughout her study, relationships deepened as the participants became collaborators and co-authors, providing valuable insight and critical feedback throughout the research – their voices weaved through from beginning to end. The final research paper has the potential to create systemic change to the service delivery model by centering the male participants' voices in future therapeutic groups.

Implications for Practice

We conclude by offering some questions and suggestions in the hopes that they will spur further discussion and promote politicized practices for our readers. We suggest students and practitioners critically reflect on the resources made available to them, as well as the policies and procedures within their agencies. We suggest asking, 'Who is benefitting and who is missing from this content?' Furthermore, we feel it is important to critically reflect on any immediate and/or delayed feelings that arise when confronting our unconscious biases that have caused others unintended harm. We feel it is important to allow ourselves to feel uncomfortable. This space of discomfort is the beginning of any

critical self-growth journey. In such cases, we promote seeking solidarity with other like-minded individuals or even support from other services to process difficult feelings. We recognize that it is necessary to be gentle with ourselves on this journey as we are often learning to 'unlearn' habits that have been with us for a lifetime. In this way, when exploring the needs that drive young people's behaviours, we hope every practitioner becomes able to reflect and act on the omnipresent influences of systemic injustice.

As we look toward a politicized and decolonized practice that is integral to CYC, we acknowledge that there is no final destination. The work that has been done by individual practitioners thus far must be taken up by the CYC community as a whole. This is a journey that we can only traverse together, by listening to each other and reaching a consensus that takes into account the multiple and diverse perspectives found in our field (Mann-Feder et al., 2017). Can we take up this journey together as an integral aspect of relational practice? We hope so.

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Racism is a Thing! Re-examination of the Concepts of Care and Relational Practice in the Preparation of Child and Youth Care Practitioners

Beverly-Jean Daniel

As in other fields of western thought and practice, Child and Youth Care (CYC) has been dominated by the perspectives of White theorists, researchers, and practitioners. Today, the changing racial, cultural, gender, ethnic, and sexual identity demographic patterns require that we have conversations that are more diverse in terms of how we investigate, frame, analyze, critique, and identify recommendations for children, families, and communities who access CYC practitioner services. Garfat (2003) spoke of the lessons learned about the importance of working "with" families rather than setting up conflictual 'us versus them' interactions which ultimately marked the parents as the enemies of their children. He also spoke of the challenges experienced when asking people to embrace differing perspectives. Garfat provided a list of factors to consider when asking ourselves either to change or to incorporate shifting perspectives into the ways in which we think of the field of CYC and the ways in which we practice. He asked for CYC practitioners to consider how to be in relationship with children and their families, how to be in relationship with each other and to rethink their perspectives.

In this article I would like to expand upon Garfat's exposition and ask that we rethink our understandings and practice in the field of CYC when we incorporate sites of diversity. There are many sites of diversity, and this piece requires the reader to shift away from the notion of universality, i.e. assuming that each idea or concept can apply equitably and will be as impactful for all of those we care for, irrespective of their grounded identity locations. That shift requires that we examine our concepts of practice by considering how our reactions, assessments, and evaluations may shift or may need to be shifted depending on the racial, gender, cultural, religious diversity of the child, youth or family with whom we are working. In this regard, the article asks the reader to consider the following: How might your ideas, theories and practices shift if you were to engage in relational practice and care specifically with racialized children, youth and families? How would you develop a relationship with them? How would you meet them where they were at? How can you become a part of their daily events if you do not understand the role that race, as a site of difference, plays in structuring their daily life events? Although it may be difficult for practitioners to integrate new perspectives into their longstanding repertoire, can the CYC field develop and move towards professionalism if the practitioners fail to consider the impact of a partial analysis on the quality of the work they provide for those being cared for? And as Gharabaghi (2017b) asks: "What work have we, and our field of child and youth care, actually done to resist these injustices?" (p.7). Thus, to what extent does the uncritical acceptance of the field in its current state replicate marginalization and oppression of those the field claims dedication to serve?

Relational Practice for Whom?

In Canada, Black and Indigenous children are over-represented within child welfare services (OACAS, 2016). They also experience negative interactions and placements in schools, leading to their over-representation in behavioural and special education classes (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Solomon & Palmer, 2006). CYC students and practitioners will encounter these children in a range of settings, including schools, community programs and residential care facilities such as group homes. CYC practitioners can provide multiple benefits to these children but developing effective

caring relationships with Black and other racialized children requires that they investigate, critique, and remain open to embedding anti-oppression, anti-racism, and other critical theories that can inform their thinking and practices with regard to relational care.

Relational practice is based on the premise that effective CYC services and supports are best provided in the context of a positive and supportive relationship between practitioners and the children, youth, and families who access their supports. Bellefeuille and Jamieson (2008) defined relational practice as "a dynamic, rich, flexible, and continually evolving process of co-constructed inquiry. In this type of inquiry, meaning emerges within the 'space between' the individual, family, or community" (2008, p. 38). Garfat and Fulcher (2012) build on the definition by indicating that the space that is created between the individuals

> "is a central feature of effective CYC practice. This co-created space represents the 'hub of the wheel' around which all other characteristics of practice revolve. We often call this co-created space between us *the relationship*… it means that the practitioner is constantly attending to the co-created space between us wondering – for example- 'is it a safe space?', 'is it a learning space?' or 'is it a developmentally appropriate place of experience?' [and] "the relationship is the intervention" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012, p. 7).

If these questions, that are central to relational care and practice, fail to incorporate the 'messiness' of identities, they will emerge as superficial musings aimed at making the practitioner feel good about their mission to serve. Asking the questions from the other side of the relationship may provide the CYC practitioner with responses that force them to question their role as helper and which result in a painful disruption of their beliefs and practices.

There are clear similarities between CYC notions of relational practice and the ethic of care put forward by Noddings (2012) which speaks to the importance of relational encounters, although her work focused on the schooling environment. Noddings speaks of the importance of care in the encounters between teachers and students wherein the student, i.e. the person being cared for, actually feels cared for and is able to learn and grow. The development of the student is based on the nature of the relationship they have with the teacher and the capacity of the teacher to identify the needs of the learner, thus allowing growth to happen together. However, these notions of care, practice or engagements, fail to incorporate analyses of race, power, racism, or the practices of racialization, which can influence the development of relational practices. Skott-Myhre (2017) argues that CYC practitioner interactions with youth, devoid of an analysis of the role of Whiteness, which is an issue of race-based power, may replicate the trauma of racism at the hands of other Whites. He argues that "We need to be aware of the fact that the young people we encounter in work may not see us as helpful and loving adults. In fact, they may well see our very existence in their lives as painful." (Skott-Myhre, 2017, p. 17). The possibility of such trauma cannot be minimized given that the children, youth and families are already experiencing varying levels of challenge. If CYC practitioners remain invested in making claims to employing relational practice, incorporating the theories and practices of anti-oppression and anti-racism are central to the development of effective practices in order to ensure that the engagements are truly relational and beneficial.

Bellefeuille and Ricks (2010) acknowledge that the relationship between parties is constructed and "because of this emphasis on the space between where meaning emerges, relational inquiry begins with the assumption that all people are social beings and, therefore, views knowledge as something that is socially constructed by people who are in relation with each other" (p. 1236). The recognition of this co-construction cannot be devoid of the consideration of people's multiple identity locations. CYC practitioners cannot determine which aspects of people's worlds they engage with and which ones are deemed to be of limited relevance given that these identity locations can impact on people's experience of the world and can influence their reactions to situations.

Gharabaghi (2017) argues that to simply keep drawing upon old explanations of pathology, resilience, or trauma to explain that which CYC practitioners have not taken the time to explore beyond the boundaries of their training and cyclical dialogues, is problematic. Sticking to these limited analyses and frames and, further, "In the process of reducing people's lives to rhetorical references, and of positioning otherness at the margins of social relations, we reinforce and indeed, reproduce, relations of power and influence, as well as relations of exclusion and oppression" (Gharabaghi, 2017a, p. 96).

In essence, those who are most affected by our work in the field, continue to experience oppression and we, consciously and unconsciously, play a role in replicating their marginalization by our failure to employ more critical and informed analysis of our society. The reality is that we live in a society that is and has been marked by race and monitored through the practice of racism. Thus, understanding and learning about race and other identity markers such as class, gender, sexual orientation and gender identities are central to the development of the space in between.

Understanding race and racism

The term 'race' is used in very general and taken for granted ways, which fail to accurately portray its relationship to power. Many people believe that race is simply a biologically determined marker, but in reality, it is a social construct. Race refers to phenotypic or visible markers that are assigned to different human groups to signify physical differences between them. Race has no biological or scientific foundation. Still, these markers affect people's lives. The ideas that have been attached to different racial groups and treating people based on those markers are referred to as practices of racialization. By itself, race is not the issue – it is the meaning that we attach to racial groups, i.e. the ideas that we construct about differently marked groups based on racial signifiers. In the Canadian context, Whites as a racial group is typically characterized by positive markers such as beauty, intelligence, wealth, etc. In contrast, other racial groups are typically characterized by negative markers, such as intellectual inferiority, incompetence, or unattractiveness. If their beauty is identified, it is marked not as normal or natural, but as 'exotic' – strange, different, and out of the ordinary. These practices of

racialization either add value to or devalue traits that are presumed to be based on racial markers.

Understanding these issues requires recognizing that the primary challenge is the practice of racism, i.e. how markers of race are used to provide or deny people access to resources such as jobs, education, medical care, housing, and social resources. Identifying someone as Chinese, South Asian, Black, or White is not a problem – the problem is how we treat people and deny them access to important resources based on those markers. Ideas about different racially marked groups and their access to social resources are also supported by institutional policies and practices, referred to as 'institutional racism' (Henry & Tator, 2010). For example, in the Canadian context, a person who is identified as Indigenous has their access to food, medical care, and education determined by governmental policies and practices. These resources are all central to the healthy development of children, families, and communities – and those who are in positions of power determine who may access resources. Equitable distribution of resources, development and implementation of policies can only be appropriately achieved if those who are charged with decision making powers have developed a comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact members of First Nations communities that moves beyond the stereotypes.

The field of CYC is not immune from these constructs of race, practices of racialization, or the realities of racism, given that everyone is exposed to the assigned meanings that are attached to markers of race. Some people make claims that they do not see color amongst people i.e., colorblindness, but the reality is that the stereotypical markers of race invade every aspect of daily life to the point to where racial markers are assumed to be normal. It is important to disrupt this normalization because it reinforces privilege for Whites and places limits on the development of other racially marked groups.

CYC practitioners who work with Black and other racialized children are not immune to the imposed meanings of race and racism, which can affect how CYC practitioners interact with the children, or the meanings that are assigned to their presenting behaviours. For example, if the practitioner believes that Black males are violent, then a male who reacts in anger because they are dealing with an emotional issue, as many

youths often do, may be read as aggressive rather than hurting. The decision-making process is typically based on the manner in which the incident was reported. Providing comprehensive quality of care and service to Black children and youth requires that our frames of care and practice encompass anti-oppressive and anti-racist theories and practices.

Anti-oppression theories focus on challenging the oppressive nature of system: they include feminism, post-colonial, anti-colonial, dis/ability, and post-modernist theories that challenge a range of social issues including poverty, gender-based discrimination, etc. (Gosine & Pon, 2011; Kumashiro, 2000). Anti-racism and critical anti-racism theories focus specifically on race and how people are affected by the social construction of race and experiences of racism (Calliste, 2000; Dei, 1996; Scheurich, 2002). These frames provide an opportunity to explore notions of care and relational practice by examining the way in which systemic racism and other forms of oppression increase the likelihood of Black and Indigenous children being taken into care, sometimes because they do not exhibit the patterns of interaction and bonding (Gharabaghi, 2017a) that is assumed to be 'normal' based on White middle-class values. The application of critical theories can allow for the CYC practitioner to understand relations of power and critique with which families are surveilled, how that surveillance happens and to recognize that their role is not simply about uncritically caring for children and families. Rather, true acts of caring are embedded in socially just outcomes that require the practitioner to support the children and families with whom they work by challenging the systems of oppression that are at play.

Preparation of CYC practitioners for working with racialized children and families

CYC practitioners provide services to Black, Indigenous and other racialized children and families in a range of community-based environments including schools, community centres, and local community organizations. In the context of schools, they often work with children in special education or behavioural classes or with disabilities. These supports may include one-on-one interactions focusing on personal care routines,

supporting behavioral programming, etc. and may be long-term or short-term depending on the needs of the youth, the school, and the family. CYC practitioners also support families in the community by providing services such as home visits, child care, and supporting parents in developing more positive relationships with their children. CYC practitioners are also more likely to be involved in community-based programs that are implemented in socio-economically marginalized communities simply based on the historical and contemporary impact of racism and marginalization, which continues to limit the economic development of marginalized communities and its members.

The quality of service provided by CYC practitioners is directly correlated to the education of CYC students. Although the majority of children practitioners work with are racialized and experience marginalization, CYC curricula continue to privilege the perspectives of Whites (Davis & Gentlewarrior, 2015). Students are also exposed to stereotypes about marginalized groups, reinforcing the idea that these groups are less effective in their roles as parents, or that they are less capable or competent overall. For example, one of the most significant challenges facing Black youth today in schools and broader society is the expectation that they will fail in school – or at best be average (Dei, 1995; Downey, Ainsworth, & Qian, 2009; James & Turner, 2017). We are all bombarded with messages about their potential for failure, and seldom exposed to messages of success. Thus, CYC practitioners are exposed to Black children, youth, and families in situations and circumstances that are rife with negative messages, and when families are in crisis. The experiences of practitioners dealing with families in crisis reinforce the idea that racialized youth and their families experience high levels of instability. Faculty members teaching at universities and colleges are seldom racialized and may not bring a holistic understanding of racialization and racism to their curriculum, thus reinforcing the stereotype about marginalized communities.

Overall, the exposure of CYC practitioners to negative messages about racialized youth, families, and communities can limit their capacity to develop effective strategies to work and engage with these youth. This does not mean that White CYC practitioners cannot develop positive relationships with racialized youth, or that racialized CYC practitioners will be automatically able to work with families. Instead, it means that

without an intentional commitment to providing a full picture of the realities of these communities, CYC practitioners are compromised in their ability to provide appropriate supports and develop healthy relationships with these youth.

Relational Care through an anti-oppression lens

Garfat and Fulcher (2012) identified a list of 25 characteristics that are central to developing relational care in the field of CYC, including love, connection and engagement, intentionality, and responsive developmental practice. They argue that to provide relational care for each child and family, practitioners must develop an understanding of the reality of that family's world. Thumbadoo (2011) provided an example of how 'love' functions in the Isibindi model of care used in South Africa, in which older women care for orphaned children. In this context, local women fill the role of CYC workers by providing supports for children and ensuring they have access to extended communal networks (Thumbadoo, 2011). With regard to cooking, she wrote:

> The meal cooked not only demonstrated food preference and flexibility, but also focus and intentionality of action. In many cases, the food cooked was food that had previously been cooked by the children's mothers when they were alive… Auntie, in the process of doing with them, taught them a skill in the moment, when they were ready to learn, and in the process, reclaimed lost memories. (2011, p. 196)

In this context, local women serving as CYC practitioners can provide love because they have a shared history and culture with the children they are supporting, so they understand them. However, it is also important to focus on relational child care across sites of difference, including differences in race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, among others. A practitioner who lacks understanding of the nuances of a community – and how the experience of race and marginality shapes a child's everyday life – may not be able to 'love', 'engage' or 'connect' with that child in the same way as someone who is

familiar with the culture. It is therefore important to expose CYC students to a range of histories, practices, and realities that move beyond stereotypes to equip them with the capacity to love and connect across differences. Further to this, the inability to understand and critically examine the systemic and institutional factors that continue to promote marginalization, will not be explored, instead focusing on the presumed pathology of the individual child, youth or family constellation.

Smith (2011) using a Freirean perspective, stated that "Love, for Freire is not some soppy, squishy feeling. It can also be uncomfortable, what he terms an 'armed love' demanding that we take a stance on behalf of those oppressed individuals and groups we work with" (2011, p. 189). Smith went on to argue that the modernist framework, which focuses on rationality and professionalism rather than direct personal engagement, has pervaded the field of CYC for generations, and that it is important to challenge these frameworks because "The assumption that we can separate off our emotional from our rational, our personal from our professional selves is a modernist conceit" (Smith, 2011, p. 190). Thus, to truly engage in relational care, we must challenge our assumptions, explore a range of theoretical and applied frameworks, and be willing to be vulnerable in learning about other groups.

An anti-oppressive framework would require that the practitioner understand notions of oppression from a historical perspective and the manifestations of oppression within the contemporary context. In addition, it is important to understand that the experiences of children, youth and their families are impacted by broader systemic and institutional barriers that often limit their access to resources that are central to their healthy development. CYC practitioners must also examine the ways in which they, as individuals, are located in the larger social dynamics of power. No individual is completely empowered or disempowered, however there are systems of power that are afforded to some people that are simultaneously denied to others. Race and gender are not neutral categories; they are imbued with power. Therefore, the ideas, beliefs and practices of all CYC students and practitioners must be analyzed and explored through these lenses of power to ensure that people are aware of the ways in which their individual identities can impact on the development of relationships.

An anti-racism perspective requires that CYC students and practitioners explore the ways in which constructs of race, racialization and the practice of racism impact people's lives. At this juncture in the evolution of the field of CYC, there needs to, at the very least, be an acknowledgement of the reality of racism and there must be a stated and intentional commitment to incorporating those frameworks into their teaching, learning and practice. Regardless of the particular model or theoretical approach employed by practitioners, the capacity to engage in a comprehensive evaluation, assessment and implementation plan requires being informed of the specific contexts that affect the children, youth, and families they serve. Before conducting any intervention for racialized and marginalized children and youth, practitioners need to understand the social forces that have brought them into contact with support services. For example, these families must deal with realities such as reduced quality of education, increased police surveillance, limited economic opportunities to escape their environments, as well as differential parenting expectations of racialized families by social service workers. The capacity to engage in a comprehensive and integrated assessment of the challenges, needs, capacities, and strengths of racialized families requires exposing CYC practitioners to open conversations about racism and varying forms of oppression. This will require direct, intentional, and consistent efforts to incorporate these discourses into CYC curricula, field placement and practice.

Conclusion

CYC practitioners are on the front lines when children, youth and families experience varying forms of crisis. They play an integral role in supporting those being cared for and the nature of the engagement they have with those being cared for is considered a central tenet of relational practice and notions of care. Although the levels of diversity continue to increase, that diversity in terms of who the CYC practitioner is and the content that they are exposed to in the context of their training, continues to be quite limited. Historically, racialized children were removed from their families and placed into care and the unfortunate reality is the pattern is still evidenced today with Black and Indigenous children being at highest risk of removal. Therefore, the average CYC practitioner will

come into contact with these children in the course of their work. If the field of CYC is to make claims to an investment in relational practice and caring for these and other children, the workers must be supported in more appropriately understand the lived realities of these children, youth and their families. The training of CYC students is a central space in their developmental process where dialogues of diversity and race must be embedded.

Race and other sites of difference impact on how people experience the world and the investment in notions of universality of care and relational practice in CYC, has the potential to do more harm than good to those in the care of CYC practitioners. Daily life events are seldom devoid of racial encounters; therefore, to be in relation with and to function in the spaces between, requires that practitioners truly explore and critically examine the lives of those they work with, which requires them to move beyond their particular perspective of the world. And although it may seem to be a challenge, true investment in relational practice requires an admission that, yes – racism is a thing!

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Unsettling the White Settler Problem in CYC

Kaz Mackenzie

I am a white, cisgender woman (she/her/hers) who has spent the last three decades working as a frontline practitioner in the field of Child and Youth Care (CYC) while living on the stolen territories of the Lekwungen, W̱SÁNEĆ, T'Souke, and Pacheedaht peoples. Both my work as a white settler CYC practitioner and my kinship ties to Pacheedaht and W̱SÁNEĆ Nations have activated a deep awareness of the "interpersonal, political, and colonial dynamics" (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 169) that inhabit the intimate folds of life.

My white settler/occupier ancestral lineage connects me to Ireland, Scotland, and England; my occupier roots have been on Turtle Island for three to seven generations, depending on the ancestral line. I use the word *occupier* with intention here, as Mi'kmaq activist and educator Sajek Ward claims that settler is a term that is too politically and historically barren. He argues that Canadians are occupiers of Indigenous homelands and must, because of this occupation, acknowledge and take responsibility for the colonial crimes we have inherited and continue to enact. Speaking to white occupiers, Ward powerfully states, "Indigenous people cannot turn [their] backs on [their] ancestors and forget the genocide of 100 million Indigenous people and the stealing and abusing of [their] children because you feel inconvenienced by its hurt. We have to acknowledge the history of colonization." (Ward, S., 2015). It is with humility and the responsibility to enact colonizer repair that I acknowledge my own occupier lineage. I cannot be separated from my ancestors' journeys, nor from the violent impacts on the peoples and lands of Turtle Island.

White settlers have a long history of turning our backs on our ancestors; systemic white supremacy requires that we do. The *hwulunitum*, the hungry ones in *Hul'qumi'num*[1], arrived on Turtle Island with colonialism as a cloak and racism as their armour. The atrocities committed by colonization, rooted in racialized systemic power imbalances, are part of the invisible history of Turtle Island. White people, particularly white CYC practitioners, must acknowledge these atrocities and instances of genocide that continue to contribute to the soul wound of the Original Peoples, in order to honour those whose lives have been stolen. This is especially salient given the recent release of *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* The report, grounded "in international and domestic human and Indigenous rights laws, including the Charter, the Constitution, and the Honour of the Crown," (National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019b, p. 168) demonstrates the hard truth that "we live in a country whose laws and institutions perpetuate violations of fundamental rights, amounting to a genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people" (National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019a, para. 3).

In seeking to unsettle the white settler problem CYC, I was guided by Paulette Regan's work *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Her scholarship links theory and practice in a call for a praxis emphasizing the truths of our history of violence and genocide while exposing the settler Canadian "peacemaker myth" and advocates for an "unsettling pedagogy" – premising that white settlers cannot just theorize about liberation and decolonization but must embody it, starting with ourselves. Through her reflections on her involvement as a witness in hearings for residential school survivors, Regan discusses the need for ethical witnessing, which she describes as listening with a decolonizing ear and heart, to honour and centre the truths of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, Regan articulates that her most profound learning came through times when she navigated "unfamiliar territory, culturally, intellectually and emotionally" (p. 18); she claims that this powerful space of

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[1] *Hul'qumi'num* is one of the languages of the Coast Salish peoples. Its literal translation is "a woman of the land or Indigenous woman" (Flowers, 2015, p.33).

not knowing may provide answers to begin unsettling settlers. She also suggests that, as settlers, we are required to start research with ourselves and then ethically and honestly engage as conscious agents of socio-political change.

In the settler colonial state of Canada, land theft, racialized poverty, ongoing traumatic consequences of residential schools, and colonial laws and policies that work to assimilate Indigenous people while denying Indigenous sovereignty continue to impact generations of children, youth, families, and communities in drastically harmful ways that meet the United Nations criteria for genocide. As Regan asserts, it is important to acknowledge that

> for Indigenous people the past is a painful chronicle of broken treaties, stolen lands, Residential Schools, and the Indian Act. For non-Indigenous people, the past is a celebrating story of settling lands, nation building and helping unfortunate "Indians" to adjust to a new life. Yet this problematic history is not in the past: it sits with us in many places – government offices, board rooms, negotiating tables, churches, hospitals, classrooms, and community halls. History is still alive *(p. 20).*

This history is alive and exists within CYC. While CYC practitioners engage in work on lands that continue to be state "continues to propagate crimes of colonization" (Kouri, 2018, p. 18) through child protection policies and practices, Euro-Western ideological supremacy and oppressive residential care institutions continue to disseminate colonial and violence alongside extensive racialized ecocide.

Defining White Settler Privilege

Settler. How do non-Indigenous people of European lineage who are the socio-political majority living in Canada define themselves? According to Métis scholar Chelsea Vowels,

settler is a relational term that assists her in keeping dialogues more focused than does using the term *white*. Vowels expresses that using the term *white* unsettles many white people and undermines communication, so, in the spirit of "give and take," she uses the term *settler* as much as possible. It is, however, of critical importance to name whiteness, to locate white settlers as racialized, and to challenge white supremacy, privilege and normalcy. Given that no categories are tidy, it is problematic to silo people into racial categories. Yet the desire to complicate or minimize whiteness too often results in a denial of its power. I therefore choose to stick with the problem of whiteness as a pervasive, elastic social formation that impacts policies and practices in CYC.

White Privilege. McIntosh popularized the term *white privilege* in her seminal 1988 article "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies." McIntosh describes white privilege as an invisible backpack of unearned assets that white people rely on daily but are oblivious to. White privilege has evolved to be defined as a status provided by a system created by white people, for white people, with white people in mind. It should be noted that McIntosh's conceptualization of white privilege has been criticized for oversimplifying intersecting analyses of oppression. Looking only at white privilege can fail to address an analysis of intersecting oppressions such as Indigeneity, gender, class, and ableism.

Settler Privilege. Settler privilege is also systemic, structural, and based in white supremacy; however, it is far more concealed and cunning than white privilege. Settler privilege exposes the core of the Canadian identity and questions the legitimacy of the settler state and settlers' entitlement to the land. Settler privileges, however, are provisional to nationality, class, gender, and migration status. The racialization of poverty, underemployment, and systemic inequities arguably deny many non-white people full settler privileges. Indigenous scholar Jodi Byrd borrows African Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite's term *arrivants* to signify those people forced to Turtle Island as a result of European and Anglo-American violence through global colonialism and imperialism.

There was no concept of "a white race before the need to justify the enslavement of Africans" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 91); "abduction and enslavement" (p. 15) forced African people to Turtle Island. Further, it is imperative to comprehend that, outside of slavery, many non-white people are diasporic and brought to the settler nation state of Canada through capitalism, exploitation, settler colonialism, and state and racialized empire building (Walia, 2013). Scholars Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) emphasized that this racialized empire requires other colonial projects, "such as enslavement, low-income work in agriculture and the highly trained technical expertise of professionals educated overseas, and displacement and migration due to war and economic devastation, to bring dispossessed people onto seized Indigenous lands."

White Settler Privilege. White settler privilege, then, conjoins white privilege and settler privilege by naming the established system created by white people, for white people, privileging white people who concurrently receive unequal citizenship benefits while profiting from living and working on stolen Indigenous lands.

Colonial and Racialized Foundations of our Child and Family Services Systems

> "Why is nobody paying attention to the actual history?"
> *(Kirsten-Lee, as cited in de Finney, 2014, p. 14)*

The voice of teenage knowledge holder and wisdom speaker Kirsten-Lee in Sandrina de Finney's vital and narrative-shifting work with Indigenous girls, *Under the Shadow of the Empire: Indigenous Girls' Presencing as Decolonizing Force*, articulates the need for white settler practitioners, and other white settlers, to learn our history. Through this section, I have highlighted other voices of these present-day wisdom and knowledge holders to uphold resilience and truth speaking. This also illustrates my own ethic of what Patricia Barkaskas and Sarah Hunt call "truth listening" alongside my commitment to disrupt dominant whitestream CYC praxis.

Patterns of submission and domination are embedded in colonial ideologies that have shaped child and family systems, including legal, child welfare, education and health systems. By the end of the 20th century, the "best interest of the child" had become firmly embedded in our laws and policies. Individualizing the best interest of the child, rather than contextualizing children's lives in connection to significant relationships and community, alienates children from core community and cultural relationships. Combined with Eurocentric concepts of the ideal white nuclear family and a state agenda of assimilation, this alienation and individualism formed part of the basis of the violent and destructive state-sanctioned reserve and residential school systems.

The atrocities of colonial systems such as residential schools are underwritten by the cradle-to-grave colonial policies of the Indian Act. Under the Indian Act, no aspect of Indigenous peoples' lives has been left uncontrolled by the white settler state; First Peoples' bodies, social and economic organizations, political structures, spirituality, and cultural fabric have all been targeted for various forms of genocide.

Current Day Manifestations of the White Settler Problem

"It's true 'cause it's not getting better through the ages."
(Danielle, as cited in de Finney, 2014, p. 14)

While the colonial state of Canada spent half a billion dollars celebrating its 150th "birthday" in 2017, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal held a third noncompliance hearing with the federal government (Palmater, 2017, para. 1). This noncompliance filing was a result of the federal government not having followed through with the 2015 Human Rights Tribunal ruling to fund Indigenous children equally to other Canadian children. First Nations children on reserve receive less funding than their Canadian counterparts: 30% less in education funding, and 22% less in child welfare payments; and while Canada's child poverty rate is 12%, it is 50% for Indigenous children (Blackstock, 2015). The Auditor General's (2011) report on a decade of federal policies for First Nations further exposed that the basic, subsistence needs of life – clean drinking water, education,

adequate housing, and child welfare – are all severely and radically substandard for First Nations. In its fifth legal order against the state, the Human Rights Tribunal stated that the denial of access to the same services to on-reserve Indigenous children was "a striking example of a system built on colonial views perpetuating historical harm against Indigenous peoples, all justified under policy" (Meyer, 2018, para. 3). According to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, these historic harms manifest into current day genocide that "has been empowered by colonial structures, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations" (National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, , 2019b, p. 50)

These policies continue to drive state-funded structures that mark and adversely impact Indigenous and non-white children, youth, families and communities. The Canadian child welfare system continues to have devastating and tragic impacts on Indigenous and non-white people (de Finney et al., 2018; Kline, 1992). There has not been an end to the targeted paternalistic, state-sanctioned effects of residential internment of Indigenous children over decades, including residential schools, Indian hospitals, day schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the present-day millennium scoop (de Finney, 2014). Today's active millennium scoop speaks to the mass removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities by the child welfare system. While Indigenous children and youth make up 7% of the population, they represent 48% of the children in government custody across Canada (Turner, 2016). These numbers reveal that there are currently more Indigenous children removed into government care than at the height of the residential school era (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The staggering state removal of Indigenous children from their homes is documented to be overwhelmingly due to neglect (Bennett, 2004; Vowels, 2016). In cases involving Indigenous children, neglect is shaped by three inter-related structural factors: poverty, sub-standard housing, and substance misuse. The impacts of neglect, inter-generational

trauma, systemic poverty and social segregation are amplified by state enforced political, cultural and territorial marginalization.

The above documentation of the current daily manifestations of ongoing settler colonialism on the lives of Indigenous children, youth, families and communities makes unexamined and undisrupted white settler praxis problematic while placing minoritized children, youth, families, and communities under colonial control and gaze within systemic whiteness. How has whiteness been examined in CYC literature?

Pronouncing Whiteness in CYC

> "So, they're all, teachers and stuff, like, oh talking about racism is too hard, it confuses the kids, so we should not do that to them, like we're too dumb to understand what happens to us every day? I think it's more like an opposite situation, like I mean they don't want to talk, or they're scared about racism because they're the group of power. They don't give us … credit that we understand and yeah, we **need** to talk about it!"
>
> *(Priya, 16, social justice activist, cited in de Finney et al., 2011, p. 375)*

Hans Skott-Myhre, a leading critical theorist in CYC, engaged in the discussion of white supremacy with his 2017 article "Seeking a Pass: White Supremacy and CYC." Skott-Myhre challenged the concept of "good" white people looking to transcend the "brutish and ignoble colonial practices of our ancestors," and outlined the requirement to take responsibility for current racialized injustices. He argued that white peoples' material status, along with roles in higher education, government, and business, are based on the current economic system of capitalism that exists because of slavery and colonialism. Skott-Myhre stressed that the rationalization for the genocide of land and bodies is based in a system that values financial profit and technological gains about life.

Kiaras Gharabaghi, another leading CYC scholar, named the whiteness of the field of CYC, while not explicitly naming white supremacy. Gharabaghi questioned the predominance of whiteness in the field and asked, "Can we change this? Can we become less white?"

In response to Gharabaghi's article, self-identified West Indian/Indo-Caribbean CYC academic Saira Batasar-Johnie wrote, "Where do racialized people fit in the field of child and youth care? Do we continue to conform, ignore and assimilate to the 'whiteness,' or do we begin to speak up and express that something is not how it should be?" Batasar-Johnie expressed her frustration at the lack of representation of Black and Brown professionals in position of power and privilege in the field of CYC and in the academy more generally. Speaking frankly about her hesitancy to address whiteness and racism in the field, she stated, "I did not want to be the one who made an entire room of white people feel uncomfortable, feel embarrassed, and feel unwanted . . . the way I have felt every day of my life." She stressed that "we do a lot of talking about inclusivity, diversity" but that this does little to address the "racism and ignorance" that are real hallmarks of CYC. She asserted a need for a shift in the pervasive whiteness that is entrenched in the academy and in the upper levels of the professional hierarchy of our field. Batasar-Johnie draws attention to the realities of a profession in which there are "full-time white staff and management with 'diverse' part-time staff," and underlines the importance for minoritized communities and students to see themselves in course context, instructors, fellow practitioners, and supervisors. Batasar-Johnie's voice and articulation of her experience of racism in CYC directly link to the duty of white settler students, practitioners, and faculty to address the white problem while getting out of the way, truth listening, and respecting the diverse voices of Indigenous and non-white practitioners and colleagues.

Johanne Saraceno also took up dominant whiteness in CYC from her vantage point as a CYC practitioner, instructor, and former graduate student. Her seminal paper, "Mapping Whiteness and Coloniality in the Human Service Field: Possibilities for a Praxis of Social Justice in Child and Youth Care," used cartography to map out power structures of whiteness and coloniality in the human service field. Saraceno illuminated how human

services are embedded within dominant Eurocentric ideologies, rooted in whiteness, coloniality, capitalism, and gender oppression. According to Saraceno, the concept of whiteness, rooted in racial superiority, is entrenched in structures and values in Canadian society. White Canadians tend to ignore the racist foundation and oppressive frameworks of their very existence as a country. Even though "white privilege is charted into our legal code," she asserted that we need only study the Indian Act to see an overt example of white privilege and colonial ideals that "protect white dominance through systemic disenfranchisement and marginalization of Indigenous people." Saraceno called for white practitioners to engage in critical attention to everyday interpersonal interactions and habitual responses and argued that examination of the centring of whiteness and power inequities in institutional structures can help rectify overrepresentation of certain racial groups in state care and justice systems. Saraceno went on to quote Susan Bordo (2008), who stressed that "white people, even those who theorize with sophistication about 'cultural difference' and the perils of ethnocentrism, are often clueless when it comes to the practical, concrete ways race matters."

CYC faculty Jin-Sun Yoon named three "elephants" – points of silence and denial – in CYC: Eurocentric worldview, western cultural hegemony, and racism. Yoon addressed the structural, systemic, and institutional forms of racism and discrimination entrenched in the field. She troubled the current practice of focusing on "problems and risk factors" in minoritized groups, stating that these frameworks perpetuate "racialized pathology." In problematizing the continued efforts to "help" Indigenous, immigrant, and queer folks who do not assimilate easily, Yoon asserted that there must be a stern change towards scrutinizing whiteness and heteronormativity in the field. This, she stated, would need to incorporate a consistent examination of power and privilege to avoid repetitive lateral violence among practitioners and academics. Yoon called for courageous conversations in the field of CYC to address the elephants in the room, and asked, "when will we in Child and Youth Care see the elephants that threaten the very future of those with whom we work?"

Calls to Unsettle CYC

CYC has had a legacy of inviting critical perspectives to unsettle established norms and approaches; however, even with this critical invitation, the field is never acquitted or removed from our colonial history. There has been mounting literature and discursive theorizing in CYC work encouraging an integration of decolonizing and social justice praxis. Coincidentally, there are demands from Indigenous and non-white CYC scholar-activists to interrogate white, Euro-Western, psycho-social notions of relational practice and the biases, injustices, and inequities that continually reproduce daily racial and colonial violence. For example, scholar-activists de Finney, Palacios, Mucina, and Chadwick recently asserted the importance of "unsettling settler systems" that have purposely targeted Indigenous and non-white children, youth, families and communities. They argue that, in CYC, we need to move beyond "relational band-aids" and centre "the political, economic, and sociocultural inequities that produce ongoing settler violence." These scholar-activists call on CYC practitioners not merely to respond with individualized practice actions but rather to expose interventions from dominant systems that colonize and cause daily harm to their communities.

As white settler CYC practitioners, we cannot assume our roles as inherently benevolent and unproblematic. Helping professions are founded on, and deeply benefit from, the forced assimilation of Indigenous children, families, and communities by the dominant white, Euro-Western state. White settler CYC practitioners may express our outrage at the immense injustices experienced, in particular by Black and Indigenous youth, families, and communities across Canada. However, there are no initiatives in the field that confront CYC practices that, according to Gharabaghi, "draw almost exclusively on white institutions, structures, processes and policies and that aid and abet in the perpetuation of social injustice based on race." The historic objective to control and dominate bodies, minds, and spirits in order that they conform with the interests of the nation is still intact. With this white hegemony foundational to CYC practice, white settler practitioners must probe our assumed innocent and benevolent position of noble and self-sacrificing front-line workers who are "caring for" the most marginalized and vulnerable children, youth, families, and communities.

To what degree are white settler practitioners complicit in the daily social, cultural, and political harms and violence done to Indigenous and racialized children, youth, families, and communities? As white settler CYC practitioners, we are all implicated in human service systems that harm people. Given the whiteness of CYC, Gharabaghi asks what the field has done to resist the enormous inequities and injustices impacting Indigenous and racialized young people, and questions whether "residential schools in Canada actually ended." He stresses that residential programs operate today that replicate residential schools, by removing and displacing Northern Indigenous youth to Southern facilities with all-white staff, including CYC practitioners. Gharabaghi also draws attention to the predominance of whiteness in CYC from the professional infrastructure, membership in professional associations, policy decision makers, and in agencies and organizations that are led "predominantly by white people, who write our job descriptions and who set the parameters within which we practice." How, then, can we in CYC move away from the myth of the white saviour that perpetuates white settler CYC practitioners' roles as solely "helpful" and "caring"? Our roles in the helping and care profession of CYC cannot be limited to everyday acts with individuals, but rather require that we involve ourselves in political action and advocacy inclusive of disrupting white supremacy and normalcy.

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Of Orthodoxies, Counter-Movements and Pragmatism: Exploring Transcendental Child and Youth Care in South Africa

Juanita Stephen and Kiaras Gharabaghi

Abstract

In this paper, the authors explore the South African context of child and youth care practice as a way of identifying approaches to practice that transcend what is often constructed as a division in the North American context of child and youth care as a professional field. We frame this discussion of the South African context as a transcendental approach, one that transcends what we call the orthodoxy and the counter-movement in the North American context. Specifically, we use some of the Characteristics of Child and Youth Care Practice as originally outlined by Garfat and Fulcher some years ago now to explore how these can be understood in a context of great complexity and nuance, such as South Africa.

Keywords

Child and youth care, community practice, South Africa, core ideas, transcendental approach.

n 2011, Thom Garfat and Leon Fulcher published an article entitled '25 Characteristics of a Child & Youth Care Approach', which, as the title suggests, articulates 25 core ideas that characterize child and youth care practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011). These characteristics are drawn from the authors' combined nearly 100 years of experience in the development and everyday manifestation of child and youth care (CYC) practice as an intellectual endeavor, a field of practice, and increasingly, a professional discipline. The characteristics take account of the many contributions to the field from a range of individuals based in North America, Europe and South Africa in particular. This publication has been quite impactful. Many post-secondary CYC programs across Canada, the US and elsewhere are framing their courses around these characteristics. In practice settings, professional development has been built around these characteristics and some of the spin off training packages, notably the 'Daily Life Events' training series (delivered multiple times across Canada, the US and especially Ireland) as well as 'The Joy of CYC' training series (limited mostly to the Canadian context). The characteristics have been referenced at national and international conferences in South Africa (where the idea of 'making moments meaningful' has really taken off), Canada, the US, Ireland, the UK and Australia. What we can say with some confidence is that this publication represents a concise and accessible articulation of CYC that has found broad acceptance in what one might term the 'orthodox CYC community' – that community that narrates its history largely along the pathways of developmental psychology and associated psycho-analytic traditions, life-space intervention practices, institutional forms of care, and the centrality of the idea of relationship (operationalized differently over time) as the core of interpersonal/intersubjective interaction.

At the same time as the 25 characteristics are helping to consolidate CYC thought and practice both in post-secondary education and in institutional and semi-institutional service settings across North America in particular, there has been a counter-movement developing that centers its intellectual traditions around narratives of oppression, systemic anti-Black and anti-Native racism, identity politics, and more generally the post-colonial political economy and associated social movements (Skott-Myhre, 2017; deFinney, Loiselle, & Dean, 2010; Munroe, 2017; Mucina, 2012). Although there has not

been a publication that seeks to articulate the characteristics of this counter movement in concise and practice-ready terms, we can say broadly that being with young people within this counter-movement is characterized by much greater emphasis on processes of advocacy, disruption, critical evaluation of socially constructed and largely Euro-centric truths, as well as community mobilization and activism within marginalized or often excluded groups (Clark, 2017; deFinney, Dean, Loiselle, & Saraceno, 2011; Watts, 2016; White, 2015).

The connections between the orthodox community and the counter-movement are tenuous at best. For the former, the counter-movement represents a departure from the focus on the interpersonal/intersubjective practice approaches within relational and everyday life-space contexts (Vachon, 2018). Furthermore, the orthodox community has responded to the counter-movement in three very specific ways: First, by ignoring it entirely and labeling it as outside of the boundaries of CYC practice; second, by digging in to protect the decades of hard work to rally its own community around a collection of core concepts and a language and narrative that goes with these; and third, by accelerating its own development of child and youth care infrastructure that embeds its core ideas in professional associations, accreditation standards, conference programs, and serial publications.

For the counter-movement, the orthodox community is part of a larger, highly problematic, infrastructure of white supremacy, the perpetuation of colonial structures and processes, and the valorization of Euro-centric approaches to social theory and its associated translations in the human services. The counter-movement labels the orthodox community as largely ahistorical and as hopelessly naïve in its notions of change that could sustain meaningful improvements in the lives of racialized and queer bodies within the context of oppressive structures (Gharabaghi, 2016; Skott-Myhre, 2017; Vachon, 2018). Of particular concern for the counter-movement is the emphasis placed by the orthodox community on universalism with respect to the core concepts of CYC. Ideas such as love, engagement, care, relationships and community are not manifested universally and instead must be considered within the broader context of

complex histories of de-humanization, dispossession, disembodiment and systematic oppression.

Much of this paper was written prior to the publication of a revised version of the 'Characteristics' in October 2018 (Garfat, Freeman, Gharabaghi, & Fulcher (2018)). At least on the surface, the revisions appear to take account of the space between the orthodoxy and the counter-movement to some degree. The new version of the 'Characteristics' explicitly cites the nuanced, multi-dimensional aspects of CYC practice tied to a far more complex understanding of the world, young people, and social relations. While this is encouraging, we formulated our arguments for this current paper based on the original version of the 'Characteristics' and the state of the intellectual discussions of CYC as we encounter it presently. It is too early to judge the impact, and the related discussions that may ensue, of the new version of the 'Characteristics'.

It is within the context of longstanding divisions in the field of CYC that we decided to explore how some of the 25 characteristics CYC practice (as reflected in both the original and the revised versions) are manifested in the specific context of South Africa. Although neither of us claims any expertise in the South African CYC field, both of us had various levels of exposure and both of us had opportunities for conversation, dialogue, observation and embeddedness in the country. South Africa seemed to us like a good place (and intellectual space) to explore how the orthodox CYC community and the counter-movement within CYC can come together in a pragmatic, child, youth, family and community-centered manner to uncover common purpose and to improve the mutual understanding and appreciation of otherwise divided perspectives. South Africa is, after all, a country that has experienced the full weight of white oppression for many decades under the highly structured system of Apartheid, the exuberance of emancipation, the on-going impacts of colonial structures, as well as the highs of innovation and economic strength on the one hand and the lows of deeply entrenched poverty, marginalization and catastrophic health problems disproportionally impacting poor and racialized peoples on the other hand (Seekoe, 2007). It is highly diverse geographic space, with many different cultures, languages, ethnicities and histories, and the country is also highly diverse with respect to its physical geography, especially in the context of urban/rural communities,

but also in the context of micro-climate zones, agricultural lands versus mountains or deserts, and access to water (Thompson & Berat, 2014). As we will discuss below, CYC in South Africa has evolved with significant influence of the orthodox CYC community based in Canada, the US and Europe, as well as with a commitment to local, national and pan-African ideas, concepts and practices (Molepo & Delport, 2015; Beukes & Gannon, 1996; Phelan, 2009). We argue that South African CYC, much more so than the North American field, has transcended the divisions of orthodoxy and counter-movement, but in so doing it has imparted some important lessons for all of us. The story of our exploration begins in the classroom, and this where we start.

The Beginning

Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario is the only university in the province to offer a graduate program in CYC and one of only three in Canada to do so. One of its offered elective courses, *International Child and Youth Care Practice*, "guides students through an exploration of child and youth care across the globe" (Gharabaghi, 2018, p. 1) and one of the first stops on that global journey facilitates students' exploration of the nature of CYC practice in South Africa. It is precisely that exploration which has served as the catalyst for this paper. One of us (Stephen) wrote a paper that focused on five of Garfat and Fulcher's (2011) characteristics of a relational CYC approach: examining context, participating with people as they live their lives, purposeful use of activities, counselling on the go, and love. Building on Manyanthi's (2008) analysis of the application of the characteristics to a South African context, Stephen's paper offered thoughts on how community based CYC practice in South Africa seems to both encompass and extend beyond the conceptualization of the 25 characteristics. Gharabaghi read the paper and was struck by the way in which Stephen positioned the South Africa context of community-based CYC practice in relation to on-going debates in the field reflecting orthodox and counter-movement ideas, even if this was not the purpose of Stephen's original paper. The collaboration between Stephen and Gharabaghi that gave rise to this current paper is not meant to represent an expert voice, or even that of someone with lived experience in a South African context. It will, however, offer an opportunity to

consider the co-existence of orthodox and counter-movement CYC elements in theory and in practice, and it will offer considerations about the youth viability and appropriateness of translating context-specific practices to other geographies, cultures, and populations.

South Africa, Communities and Context

"Child and youth care practice unfolds within the context of communities. This may appear as a fairly obvious statement. However …
(Gharabaghi, 2008, p. 258).

The 'however' in the opening of Gharabaghi's (2008) paper unfolds over the following pages in which he unpacks just how obvious this statement *is not*. From the definition of the word 'communities' to the nuance of the CYC practice that can and does takes place within and alongside them, Gharabaghi (2008) speaks to the possibilities and the missed opportunities for community engagement within the field of CYC. Through a discussion of the ways in which community can be understood, we also learn what community is *not.* It is not a synonym for neighbourhood, not confined to an "identifiable geographic space" (Gharabaghi, 2008, p. 259). However, communities may be recognized by geography – as a part of a city or town and the social and cultural infrastructure within it. Communities may be geographic spaces that house a higher-than-average density of residents sharing political identities (Gharabaghi, 2008). Communities can also be understood through self-identified membership in a non-space-bound group of individuals who share identity markers, interests or passions (e.g. the deaf community or online social communities such as Black Twitter) (Gharabaghi, 2008; Young Entrepreneur Council, 2012). Gharabaghi (2008) also emphasizes the fact that communities often overlap, with individuals identifying as members in many communities at the same time.

While the concept of community-based CYC practice is most often referring to work within *geographic* communities, it is important to recognize that within those space-

bound places there is often a context that informs the experiences of the residents who live there, the consideration of which can create opportunities for more relevant CYC practice.

In the South African context, the contemporary experiences of young people throughout the country cannot be separated from their historical, political and colonial context. It would be entirely unhelpful and ill-fitting, for example, for a white practitioner to decide on an English-only, race neutral lens in their relational practice with Black children in a post-Apartheid nation. The very process of racialization is such a part of South Africa's political history that ignoring it is to ignore the lasting impacts of Apartheid connected to the multi-ethnic identities of South Africans racialized as 'Black' or 'Coloured' and how that extends to the significance of the linguistic diversity within a country that boasts 11 official languages. Context is essential. Garfat and Fulcher (2011) speak about the importance of context, saying: "Examining context requires one to be conscious of how everything that occurs does so in a context unique to the individual, the helper, the specific moment of the interaction and the history of such interactions" (p. 10). The historical context of South Africa has a direct impact on the settings in which CYC unfolds, who is most likely to need various types of support, and who will have access to the services and resources available.

Phatlane (2003) provides a context to explore CYC in South Africa by focusing on the connection between 'Apartheid-created poverty' and the (in)ability to access health resources that would, for instance, provide the necessary treatment to prolong the life of an individual infected by HIV. Political decisions during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki resulted in a divestment of financial resources from HIV/AIDS-related initiatives under his advisement that "the impact of AIDS in Africa had been exaggerated" (Phatlane, 2003, p. 76). With less money for public health education campaigns and funded interventions, HIV treatment became increasingly only available to the affluent (Phatlane, 2003). To date, according to UNAIDS (2018), South Africa has the highest HIV population in the world, being home to 19% of the global population of people living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2018). Despite now also having the largest treatment program in the world, "in 2016, South Africa had 270 000 new HIV infections...and 110 000 AIDS-related deaths"

(UNAIDS, 2018, para 1). As a result, more than 1.7 million children were orphaned by AIDS in 2016 (UNAIDS, 2018).

The growing number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS over the years necessitated a response from the government, and in 2007, the South African Children's Amendment Act No. 41 recognized the status of child-headed households (i.e. a home without residents over the age of 18 years), legislating "protective measures" for the children living within them (Thumbadoo, 2011). This context directly impacts the ways in which CYC is manifested in South Africa. In fact, this prompted the development of *Isibindi* – a CYC model of practice that was developed in response to this legislation and which takes to heart the importance of context in its work.

The Characteristics

Participating with People as They Live Their Lives

> "Child and Youth Care involves being with and participating with
> people in the everyday moments of their lives"
> *(Garfat & Fulcher, 2011, p. 8).*

This characteristic of a relational CYC approach centres on the practitioner's engagement with people in *the doing* of their life. It is one of the key tenets of CYC – an understood principle that the practice of CYC can and does unfold wherever there are young people and families to engage with. CYC practice is not restricted by setting or activity, neither confined to offices or classrooms nor excluded from them; not bound to planned programs, but free to become involved with the mundane and exciting aspects of people's daily lives (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011). In South Africa, a particular and contextually-specific model of community-based CYC practice has emerged that provides child and youth care workers (CYCWs) the opportunity to do just that.

Isibindi, which means 'courage' in isiZulu (NACCW, 2014a), is a model of care developed by South Africa's National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) and implemented in partnership with local community agencies (NACCW, 2014a; Thumbadoo, 2011). In response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its previously discussed impact on family structure, Isibindi projects were implemented to support and protect children in child-headed households. Isibindi CYCWs take on a variety of roles in support of the family, which include advocacy, facilitating access to financial aid/grants, ensuring children are in school and establishing/maintaining connection to extended family (Thumbadoo, 2011). CYCWs also do the work of being and participating with the family as they live their lives. Thumbadoo (2011) describes some of the everyday life events that a CYCW may participate in, including: being in the home to see children off to, or receive them home from school; preparing meals with and for children; and supporting the development of meaningful and predictable household routines in the absence of an adult. The essence of Isibindi is realized in the process of "using ordinary human interaction as a context and a means for transcending basic care to meet the emotional needs of children" (NACCW, 2014a, para 4).

While Isibindi projects are arguably the most internationally known model of South African CYC practice – perhaps because of the social franchise model that has facilitated its widespread delivery (Thumbadoo, 2011) and perhaps because of it's unique approach to service – it is far from the only CYC service in the country. Another framework of community-based CYC that embodies participation alongside young people is practiced through supporting their transition out of care. An example of this is the LaunchPad Youth Transition Program (run by the Homestead Projects for Street Children) which offers support to young people who are transitioning from supported living environments into independent/interdependent and self-led lives (Mamelani Projects, 2018; The Homestead, n.d.).

The transition from care involves the development of daily living skills that will allow young people to navigate the systems that permit them access to accommodations, education, employment and personal documentation (the Homestead, n.d.). The LaunchPad Youth Transition Program describes that interaction as "[creating] an

interdependent system of living and ongoing reciprocal care so youth are not abandoned into adulthood." (The Homestead, n.d., para 10). In this sense, the term 'transitioning out of care' almost seems inappropriate and might more accurately be described as 'reconstructing the caring relationship.'

Purposeful Use of Activities and Counselling on the go

> "Unlike other forms of helping, a CYC practitioner does not meet with someone for a counseling session at a scheduled time and place. [It] occurs through fragmented interactions, trusting that the ability of the other and the skill of the CYC practitioners will continue to connect such moments together into a complete process"
> *(Garfat & Fulcher, 2011, p. 16-17).*

> "The practitioner attempts therefore to facilitate learning opportunities in the everyday"
> *(Garfat & Fulcher, 2011, p. 15).*

These two characteristics, which will be discussed jointly, could easily be discussed along with the previous characteristic of being and doing with. In the examples used above – Isibindi and LaunchPad – purposeful use of activities and counselling on the go are integral parts of CYC practice. Transitional programs necessarily involve a degree of mobility and dynamic interaction as CYCWs support young people in accessing people, belongings, and information. Molepo (2005) shares an account of their work in community based CYC, attempting to support a young person to find and reunite with their family:

"When we got to the station, he had me drive around the place for about an hour without any progress in finding the place. We even parked the care and walked around the areas he remembered that he used to walk across the station bridge to and from school. But, after all our efforts, I decided to give up, and we drove back to the residential facility … On our way back to the programme, he started sharing stories about growing up in another province, Kwazulu Natal." *(p. 14)*

This is a literal representation of counselling on the go. The work of the CYC practitioner in this case happened while in transit, while driving, walking and learning about the young person's history. These are opportunities that Garfat and Fulcher (2011) discussed, in which life-lessons can be learned. In the case of this young person, the lesson may be that someone is invested in this part of their life that is important to them. The act of seeking to reunite the youth with their family member becomes the activity that facilitates CYC practice in this context.

Another example of this is found in the Isibindi safe parks. The NACCW has developed safe parks in alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) article 31 that recognizes children's right to leisure and play (NACCW, 2014b). Safe parks are staffed by trained CYCWs and children are free to come and do the work of children – play! Free play, structured activities, homework support, indigenous games and cultural practices, including storytelling by elders take place within the safety of the park (NACCW, 2014b). Through facilitation of these activities and joining in with children, games, songs and stories become the sites of communication, learning and development. CYCWs utilize the activities that unfold in safe parks purposefully as assessment and intervention tools to promote healing and learning with the children and young people who attend. Even if the lesson is that there are spaces for them to shed the responsibility of caring for others and be cared for themselves.

Love

> "CYC practice is … an act of love and loving – one holds the others
> dear, one cherishes their being, and ultimately one acts in the
> context of love in a non-exploitative manner"
> *(Garfat & Fulcher, 2011, p. 17).*

Next, we come to love. This tiny word holds a range of meaning, from feelings of deep reverence for the sacred (in the context of faith practice or religion, for example) to an emotional response to the comparatively trivial ("I *love* that shirt on you!"). Love in the context of CYC practice suggests a quality that emerges "when real connections are made between self and other" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011, p. 17). Interestingly, love in this particular context, as referenced by the immediately preceding quote, is based on the Thumbadoo (2011) paper on South Africa's Isibindi model of service. Garfat and Fulcher (2011) align this concept with the Nguni term *Ubuntu* which, according to Kamwangamalu (1999) "is a multidimensional concept which represents the core values of African ontologies: respect for any human being, for human dignity and for human life, collective sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, inter-dependence, communalism, to list but a few" (p. 25-26). In short, Ubuntu (much like Isibindi) is not a western concept, construct or entity; it is wholly and uniquely pan-African.

In the referenced paper, Thumbadoo (2011) further discusses love in conjunction with labour. She asserts that love is realized in the action of caring for children, within the process of understanding and enacting the symbols and rituals that bring a sense of security, connection, value and – yes, love alongside the family. Love in this sense embodies Ubuntu – an interconnected experience of community that may be practiced less in urban settings than rural ones. Kamwangamalu (1999) attributes this difference in the prevalence of a contemporary adoption of Ubuntu to increased contact with and influence from an individualistic (rather than communalistic) western world. It is for this reason that caution is offered when considering the replication of models of care in different contexts. While love may be a concept that is widely recognized (however

differently the concept attached to the linguistic marker may be understood in various geographic and cultural contexts), community-based models of CYC practice that seek to embody love must do so with a deeply-rooted understanding of the communities in which they will be implemented. Isibindi projects, for example, would not be easily mapped from a rural setting in South Africa to an urban Canadian setting, nor effectively reproduced in some urban settings in South Africa, for that matter. Similarly, concepts like Ubuntu cannot be transplanted and understood as a global, CYC-relevant synonym for love. For some African diasporic peoples, Ubuntu may be a relevant, even central concept for moving through the world. However, there is a necessary distinction between rooting our work in an acknowledgment of what this may mean for some of the families we are working with, and assuming that practitioners have access to this value system as a practice philosophy. For practitioners whose personal histories and professional lives are neither rooted not situated in an African context, love must mean something else.

It's all About Us

> "[This] refers to the fact that, ultimately one's successes or failures
> with other people are profoundly influenced by who CYC
> practitioners are themselves ... It is only through a deep and active
> self-awareness that they can be reassured that his or her actions
> are in the interest of the others and not simply the CYC practitioner
> meeting their own needs ..."
> *(Garfat & Fulcher, 2011, p. 18).*

This final characteristic offers an explanation of CYC practice that focuses on self-awareness. Revisiting the idea of Ubuntu, this concept in a South African context may be reconceptualized as a focus on other-awareness, which would inform an understanding of the self. One definition given for Ubuntu is that "Ubuntu is understood as a collective solidarity whereby the self is perceived primarily in relation to the perception of others,

that is, persons are perceived less as independent of one another, and more as interdependent of one another" (Laden 1997 as quoted by Kamwangamalu, 1999, p. 26). In this sense, the practitioner would seek to understand how their perspective and identity have been shaped and constructed by their membership in the collective. Though earlier in the paper, caution was offered against attempts to directly map practices and principles into other contexts, we will draw a comparison in this case to a Canadian context.

Canadian CYC practitioners who recognize that the institutions in which they are educated and the political and social context in which they practice are systems that uphold hegemonic discourses (of white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy etc.), may be able to understand how their professional identities (and by extension, their practice) are informed by the fact of their existence in this context. For example, one might question how they have come to conceptualize the idea of 'care' or what it means for a child to be 'in need of protection'. Further to that, CYC practitioners might consider how their professional identity is linked to notions of power and access as well as which dynamics of interaction with young people and families most reinforce this professional identity and, by contrast, which interactions are disruptive to their idea of what it means to be a helper. These considerations offer an opportunity to develop a deeper, broader self-awareness that is inclusive of the people and contexts that inform our understanding of self, while a focus on self-awareness without collective-awareness is both limited and limiting.

Orthodox and Counter-Movements Together

The characteristics of a relational child and youth care approach offer a framework to consider the ways in which CYCs do the work that we do. However, there are some opportunities to consider if these characteristics can still be thought of as widely applicable. As CYC practice unfolds in the community, the individual needs of young people must be considered, understanding the necessity to push back against notions of monolithic "communities" (i.e. "the Black community" or "the LGBTQ" community). It is also important, however, to be aware of how historical, political, and social contexts offer

a backdrop to individual experiences that necessarily inform our approach to service within the communities served. For example, practitioners should be aware of the systemic and institutional oppressions that impact some groups differently than others, despite the diversity amongst the members of that group (i.e. racialized transphobia, homo-ableism, HIV status as it relates to apartheid-created poverty).

There are several unique features of the development of CYC in South Africa as a professional field and an intellectual endeavor that are apparent in the discussions above. First, CYC in South Africa is not merely a response to specific challenges faced by individual children and youth; it is instead a component of a much broader program of national development and national identity. Operationally, the profession is recognized in national legislation and backed by significant government initiatives, while still unfolding largely through the work of NGOs, some of which are quite institutionalized while others are grassroot service providers in local environments (Jamieson, 2013). Second, the field of CYC in South Africa has demonstrated much greater ambition than its counterparts in North America or Europe. CYC is one of the core responses to a catastrophic national (indeed, international) health crisis (HIV/AIDS). Third, and perhaps most directly congruent with the framework of this article, the operationalization of CYC in South Africa has pragmatically integrated orthodox concepts and practice approaches drawn largely from the global North (including very substantially from Canada) and counter-movement concepts and ideas that are deeply connected to local, regional and national ways of being in the world (Jamieson, 2013). The Isibindi Safe Parks, for example, which were developed in partnership with Danish consultants (NACCW, 2014b), represent on the one hand a nod to orthodox ideas about practice milieus (Safe Parks are fenced-in spaces under CYC supervision and with CYC structured programming – emulating residential care without the building), while at the same time serving as emancipatory teaching and learning spaces focused on indigenous cultures, traditions, games, narratives and communities.

A fourth unique element about CYC in South Africa is the strong focus on the utilization of existing community resources, including human, social and physical capital (Phelan, 2007). In Isibindi as well as other CYC projects, the nature of intervention, the

form of program delivery and the human resources associated with that delivery are drawn locally and are supported to maintain their local aesthetic, ways of being, cultural and philosophical underpinnings and collective community entitlements (Thumbadoo, 2005). CYC is explicitly and purposively constructed outside of universalist categories. Love, care, life-space, everyday life events, engagement, rights, family, and community are constructed and re-constructed in accordance with uniquely positioned and ever-evolving social relations in particular settings. No attempt is made to frame universal concepts that become mainstreamed and imposed (Molepo, 2005a). In this way, we find space for both orthodox ideas about practice (making moments meaningful, working in context, the role of love) and counter-movement ideas about power, colonialism, white supremacy and other categories of oppression.

The unique manifestations of community CYC practice in South Africa is encouraging because of its development in response to a context and need. While it doesn't claim to be perfect, we consider it a great theoretical reference for the ways in which CYC practice could unfold based on transcending current divides between orthodoxies and counter-movements. A good start is to reflect more deeply on our understanding of the needs of the communities that are be affected by our practices.

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Enriching Relational Practices with Critical Anti-Black Racism Advocacy and Perspectives in Schools

Tanitia Munroe

Despite the attempts at an inclusive and equitable education system, the school environment in Ontario remains one of the dominant institutions where Black youth experience inequalities. Efforts to support Black youth in Canadian schools have generated many discussions over the years. More recently there has been an intensified focus on the widespread disparities in experiences with a renewed call for systemic change (James & Turner, 2017). These conversations include highlighting unequal educational outcomes and differential treatment. Black youth often face an unwelcoming and unfriendly school environment because of their race, gender and class, while trying to actively participate in their school community (Hussain, 2015; James, 2011; Codjoe 2006; Dei & James, 1998; Dei, Mazzuza & McIsaac, 1997).

In responding to calls for action from the helping professions working within the school settings, school-based Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioners must recognize the implications of their interactions with Black youth. More importantly CYCs should also understand the ways anti-Black racism is manifest while also appreciating the systemic issues that lead to risk factors encountered by Black youth daily inside schools. This call for an increased awareness by CYC practitioners further suggests the need for an anti-racist theoretical framework to guide the field of CYC practice. Such a framework should

include a critical analysis of how Black youth encounter experiences of being disadvantaged based on the color of their skin, as the racism they face is reinforced, repeated and adjusted daily through interactions with staff in schools (Dovemark ,2013; Brathwaite & James, 1996). Having such a critical framework would enable CYC practitioners to use both structural and relational critical intervention approaches which could lead to greater capacity building and advocacy opportunities when working alongside Black youth.

Black identity

For the purpose of this paper the word Black will refer to any people of African descent, encompassing Afro Caribbean, African Canadian, Africans, Black Canadians and Afro Latin Americans. Although Black Canadians do not exist in a singular homogenous form (Campbell, 2012), the term Black is consistent with preferences in how Black people label themselves and "may also mitigate against the usage of a term such as African Canadian, which refers to a more distant cultural heritage" (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000, p.219). For African-Canadians whose identity is on a continuum, Black identities have become more than skin color or intersections of one's culture; it is also an understanding of what is meant by experiencing shifting identities similar to that of sex, gender, occupation, class and history (Neeganagwedgin, 2014; Wane, 2009; Dei & James, 1998). According to Carl James (2011), the educational outcomes and experiences of students are often influenced by gender and race. Thus, having clarity about racial identity labels is important for Black youth because these words are "not simply words we use to identify and differentiate individuals" (p. 468).

Being with youth in school settings

The profession of CYC in the Canadian context is grounded in relational principles and practices. It involves being with young people where they are and participating in their everyday milieu (Burns, 2014; Garfat & Fulcher, 2012; VanderVen & Torre, 1999). The school setting has long been one of the environments where CYC practitioners help facilitate the social and personal development of young people (Fox, 1987). CYC

practitioners partner up with teachers and other school staff personnel to provide social, emotional and academic support for youth (VanderVen & Torre, 1999). Core CYC principles guide practitioners to remain focused on the importance of relationships and communication that is "immediate and focuses on the moment as it is occurring" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012, p.6). According to Garfat and Fulcher (2012), using the everyday, seemingly simple moments as they occur can provide relevant opportunities for intervention and change in a young person's life. However, in schools, CYC practitioners are exposed to issues of power and privilege in and outside of classrooms (Bamber & Murphy, 1999) as "educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.26). Therefore, although CYC practitioners aspire to the relation-centered approach (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010), they are also exposed and perhaps influenced by the non-relational ways in which Black youth are perceived and treated within the school system. As a result, many Black youth experience alienation and ambivalence from a dominant system via unofficial and unspoken norms, behaviors and values embedded in educational culture and practice.

Anti-Black Racism

According to Dei (2008), many educators claim to bring color blindness to their teaching and interaction with Black youth. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define color blindness as the belief that one should treat all persons equally, without regard to race. This is problematic, as it systematically ensures that the status quo is continuously replicated in the attitude and practices of the school system. More importantly, the claim by educators of color-blind practices simply embodies further oppression by failing to recognize the impact of race and anti-blackness on lived experiences of Black youth. Thus, it is essential that CYC practitioners develop an understanding of how racism conditions the minds of Black people on a systemic and individual level and disrupts the lives of Black youth in education.

Anti-Black racism, as the systemic discrimination that embodies resentment towards Black people, is such a part of the lived experience of Black people, (Dumas & Ross,

2016) that it has become the central focus of how many Black people make sense of every aspect of their environment. This is common as their "social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p.429). While not surprising, and perhaps a further indication of the dominant culture, there is little or no theory on anti-Black racism in the education system (Dumas, 2016). However, documented evidence of cultural disregard, verbal assault, micro-aggression, implicit biases and physical attacks on Black youth (Dumas, 2016) make it apparent that Black student's frequently suffer outcomes that are much less frequently experienced by non-Black students.

The experiences of the shared effects of the historical, economic, social and structural conditions are important in relation to the development of Black youth as these students progress through school (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010). The problems/issues that Black youth face in their school environment are often ignored by school administrators, which further contribute to adverse outcomes (James, 2011). Specifically, the unequal treatment in terms of school discipline attributed to Anti-Black racism is often glossed over and reframed - labeled as an isolated issue that Black students experience individually (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Wun 2016). Dei (2008) further adds, "the existence of systemic inequities, whiteness as the norm to which all schooling practices defer, and the claim to colour blindness that masks and complicates racialized institutional problems are all despairing and need to be addressed" (p.353). Flagg (1993) also identifies whiteness as being the racial norm where the Black person, not the white, is the one who is different (p.971). For Black students, their everyday action is therefore judged based on the expectation of the dominant white culture in their school environment. Thus, there is a reliance on primarily white referents in formulating the norms and expectations (Flagg, 1993) that become criteria for all decision-making and also influences the attitudes of school staff.

The dominance of white referents is an ongoing challenge in schools, resulting in continued discrimination despite well-documented and often directly observed acts of racism and marginalization perpetrated against Black youth. Reports such as *Fighting an uphill battle: Report on the Consultations into the Well-Being of Black Youth in Peel*

Region (Turner Consulting Group, 2015) and *Towards Race Equity in Education: The schooling of Black Youth in the Greater Toronto Area* (James, C., & Turner, T., 2017) continue to capture this ongoing battle. These reports both investigated the educational experiences as well as issues and perceptions of Black youth in the Toronto Region while these youths were attempting to navigate school. In the absence of CYC pedagogy informed by research documenting anti-Black racism, it is essential that CYC practitioners working in these school systems should prepare, reflect and consider their own position as relational practitioners. While some CYC practitioners may strive to integrate social justice and advocacy perspectives into their practices, many appear to lack a deep understanding of systemic and institutional barriers specific to Black youth in their school environment (James, 2011).

Without disregarding the emphasis placed on teaching about caring relationships between young people and CYC practitioners, CYC education often fails to provide curriculum specific to anti-Black racism or referencing the history of systemic racism that affects the Black population (Munroe, 2016). The current relational theory and practice lacks race analysis, self-reflexivity, and continues to propagate institutional norms and policies that oppress Black youth. This yields a relational practice approach that itself is often white dominant, and disconnected from the everyday experiences of Black youth in schools.

Re-conceptualizing risk factors for Black youth

The term 'at risk' has become very popular in the language and policy discourse in many countries including Canada and the United States (Dei, 2008; James, 2011; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). This term, when understood, describes the disparities that exist within the corridors and hallways of schools that have had a substantial influence upon the development of Black youth (James, 2011). Kelly (2000) states:

> The use of the 'at risk' discourse can be deemed dangerous as it "represents attempts to regulate and recode institutionally

structured relations of class, gender,   and race in ways that
serve to make youth and their parents responsible for the youth's
circumstances, opportunities, options, and life chances" (p. 468).

Based on race, cultural assumptions and other "risk-inducing" constructs, such as class, immigrant status, family makeup and neighborhood (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001), the language of risk serves as a placeholder for racism, sexism, and other form of biases. This notion of 'at risk' leads to negative interaction with school staff, academic disengagement and failed interventions within the school environment (James, 2011; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). Risk is not an intangible or rhetorical concept, but one in which individuals, communities and groups, are assessed based on the values that society values and normalizes (Fine, 1993).

Risk is therefore a dominant discourse that allows for the negative labeling of lived experience but also of Black youth themselves - further perpetuating anti-Black racism in everyday interactions in their school communities. There are multifaceted ways in which inequality is condensed into identity and everyday experiences but these are not 'risks' *per se*. For example, lack of equal opportunity, systemic racism, racial discrimination, academic streaming and unequal school discipline impact Black youth directly and indirectly (Atkins, 2012; Dovemark, 2013; James, 2011; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013) leaving them further marginalized and at a severe disadvantage. Thus the use of the term 'risk factors' should be understood as experiences in a youth's life that occur in their environment, have the potential for causing stress and increase the likelihood for causing harm (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

Furthermore, an examination of these 'risks' reveals these factors to be directly linked to oppression, limited resources, social exclusion and the ways in which Black students are recognized and feel connected to their environment (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). As CYC practitioners engage with Black youth the oppressive nature of the concept of 'at risk' must be acknowledged, and understood to predispose Black youth to experience unfavorable outcomes in the school system. Importantly, CYC practitioners

must also be exposed to and critically aware of the anti-Black nature of this dominant discourse before they can fully engage in building mutual relationships with Black youth. The probability of developing allied relationships will be directly influenced and measured by the views CYC practitioners hold about 'risk factors' associated with institutional or systemic barriers that leads to exclusion for Black students (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010).

Capacity Building

The school environment helps in the shaping of attitudes, conversations and the belief systems that service Black youth (Hussain, 2015; Cramer, Gonzalez & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014; James, 2011; Joseph & Hunter, 2011). Historically, there have been countless negative interactions between Black students and their larger school environment, including negative statements made about their ability to succeed (James, 2011). As a result, many Black youth experience alienation from the dominant school system through unofficial and unspoken norms as well as behaviours and values that were in fact learned in schools. Therefore, engagement with and by Black students can be very empowering if done meaningfully and authentically to support Black youth to learn that their voices can make a difference in the school environment.

However, engagement and authentic relationship building require resources and intention. Engaging with the Black student population requires time and building capacity (Snow & S.H. & K.S., K. 2013). The contextual nature of Black student experience must also be acknowledged, which suggests that efforts to build relationships and capacity with Black students must also be linked to their social, physical and cultural spaces within their communities (Barnes & Wimberly, 2016). Strengthening the capacity of Black communities cannot be done without also acknowledging socio-economic factors, related standards of living and barriers to quality of life. This includes the systemic ways in which communities are marginalized through unemployment, unfair treatment by police, racial profiling, stereotyping, low funding and lack of resources.

Capacity building entails how a community can utilize its own strengths and potential (Gharabaghi, 2008; Barter, 2007). According to Gharabaghi (2008), it is based on the

belief "that all communities, no matter how marginalized, have strengths or assets that could give rise to healthy and functional day-to-day experiences" (p.272).

While several paradigms exist for successful engagement strategies, capacity building is a continuous process. This demands long-term commitment and engagement in all aspects of capacity building planning, activities and evaluation. CYC practitioners from both school and community settings then should proactively and intentionally draw on and with the Black communities' knowledge and Black youth lived experience in their work, home and school. In response, members of the Black community will serve as an important purveyor of knowledge, and experiences that can be accessed to holistically help in building further capacity (Barnes & Wimberly, 2016). Black youth are experts in their lives and this position needs to be acknowledged by CYC practitioners who can then look to Black youth to also assume responsibility in their own development. In doing so, CYC practitioners will not only be congruent in terms of their relational practice theory, but also better able to support the needs of Black youth, by way of giving voice to their unique perspectives and lived experiences.

Advocacy

One of the further principles of CYC practice is the use of advocacy in the educational setting. Advocating in support of and with Black youth can not only have a direct positive impact but can also "make a contribution to the achievement of social justice at the macro level" (Bamber & Murphy, 1999, p. 241). In understanding the importance of position and power in youth advocacy, CYC practitioners must significantly shift to understanding the structural inequalities that are practiced in educational settings (Bamber & Murphy, 1999). Continuous inequality leads to academic disengagement of Black youth in the education system. The oppression and inequality that forms a youth's self-perception often results in questioning or challenging a sense of worth, humanity and the appreciation of a larger place in the world (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). Understanding this, CYC practitioners should be able to identify layers of oppression and seek ways, when working alongside Black youth, to dismantle the status quo. When discussing Black youth informally or formally with school staff and administrators, CYC

practitioners should aim to advocate and contribute to discursive social change as their end goal (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo ,2013). The unique role as active advocates, as well as the opportunity to share a larger community and life space, enables CYC practitioners to bring Black youth narratives to various platforms of power at which decisions about future lives are made.

Critical practice

Despite the significance of relationships and rapport in CYC practice the language of relationships is not always the language CYC practitioners can utilize in everyday interactions. Indeed, the person-centered and relational approach to youth work can at times fail to accept the complexity of the multilayered experiences of the lives of Black youth as they navigate and experience school in ways that are distinct from students with other racial identities (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). Issues of power and control, central to the formation and continuation of any relationship, are still manifested. However, with Black youth, these forces often result in a sense that some voices are being heard while many are silenced. The complexities of relationship building are also challenged by the specific context in which these relationships are formed. The context of the Black youth's life, as experienced inside and outside of the school environment, will affect how relationships with these adolescents unfold (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

To this end, CYC practitioners may well benefit from learning about and implementing a social justice approach. Through this lens, CYC practitioners may develop a critical understanding about anti-Black racism and the challenges it presents, and be better able to raise their voices and advocate alongside Black youth as this approach aligns more with the much written about 'doing with, rather than 'for' or 'to' young people. In this way, critical child and youth work can embody a social justice as well as a social change approach. As CYC professionals learn ways to tap into resources to advocate for structural changes, they need to work alongside Black youth in order for them to achieve their own liberation within the school system (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008). This is done

through the development of a critical consciousness or sociopolitical development (Diemer& Hsieh, 2008).

A further way to embed critical engagement in CYC practice is through the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in discussions and interactions. According to Bamber & Murphy (1999), "critical practice is not an event, a final or ultimate moment of radical work, but a process of working towards a preferred, anti-oppressive future" (p.227). CRT suggests that everyone engaged in relational work, and working toward systemic change should analyze the patterns of inequality while also examining the every day practices that lead to racial injustice (Su, 2007). Of interest to CYC practitioners in school settings is the premise underlying CRT as manifested in education (Nelson, 2014). Through this lens, it is understood that race acts as a blueprint to help examine the experiences of student populations who are historically under-represented (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

In applying this theory, CYC practitioners will learn how to query, analyze and establish how, when and why anti-Blackness and biases materialize in the everyday practice by school administrators, teachers, and perhaps even in their own practices. Research applying concepts from CRT has identified that anti-Black racism is pervasive and has become institutionalized in the education system in Canada and the United States (Simson, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, in framing Black youth experiences through critical race theory, CYC practitioners will be able to critically analyze and understand how racism impacts the discussion about Black students' lives, which in turn could add clarity about the purpose and method of the intervention in their work.

Conclusion

Attending to the here-and-now (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012; Garfat, 2003), of Black students' experiences is critical. If Black youth have little or no supports in their school environment, it can potentially lead to social exclusion. Research has found that Black youth face more challenges navigating schools than their white peers (Codjoe, 2006; Dei, Mazzuca & McIsaac,1997; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Hussain, 2015; James, 2011; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Winton, 2011). It is clear that for Black students, their race is used to mediate their experiences and outcomes in

education (Hussain, 2015; James, 2011; Codjoe 2006). Thus, for many Black students their school experiences are not only a cultural adjustment requiring constant attention but also a manifestation of differential treatment as experienced in relationships with teachers, administrators and other staff (Brathwaite & James, 1996).

The systemic racism encountered by Black students as they navigate school can further shape how these students perceive self-worth and form their identity. It is therefore imperative that CYC practitioners focus on the representation of Black students in this system from the point of view of the authentic lived experiences of these same youth. Such an informed point of view will critically 'colour' practices and language, such as 'at risk', revealing many of these to be further forms of oppression. In addition, standing alongside Black youth in recognition of their position as experts in their own lives will further enable CYC practitioners to understand identity struggles over the culture of Black student education (Dei & James, 1998). Thus, although the relational framework is important in CYC practice, it is perhaps less suitable as a stand-alone theory through which to understand the experience of Black students. As CYC practitioners take on the essential task of engaging Black youth in the public school system one of the most important discourses that should emerge is a demonstration of activism regarding anti-Black racism. There should be curriculum developed in all CYC post-secondary programs specific to racism and critical race theory. Additionally, the leadership, power and evaluation practices of voice within CYC education and practice itself should be critically examined through these same lenses. Finally, the realms of relational work, so integral to all of CYC practice, need to be considered and expanded to include issues that are explicit to race – specifically those that impact Black youth both on individual and systemic levels. Indeed, perhaps only a profession such as Child and Youth Care has the potential to critically examine itself in such a way as to ensure that a professionally informed and often privileged practice aligns with the multilayered experiences of Black youth in the school community.

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Why are we so Black? A Review of the Literature on Educational Experiences of Black Youth in Ontario's Child Welfare System

Travonne Edwards

Black youth and families are overrepresented in the child welfare system within Canada and are at increased risk of being reported to Children's Aid Societies (CAS) by professionals and community members, are more frequently placed in out of home care, have longer involvement with CAS, and lower likelihood of being reunited with their biological families or being adopted (Clarke, 2012). The overrepresentation of young Black people in child welfare reflects broader systemic racism faced by Black Canadians in areas such as education and justice. For the last several decades, the provincial government of Ontario has launched various initiatives to address systemic racism faced by Black youth, including education and the child welfare system, but none to address the intersection of both systems (Anti-Racism Directorate, 2017).

Low school performance is only one disadvantage faced by children in residential care. However, this issue causes some of the most severe dilemmas for their life chances within adulthood (Gharabaghi, 2011; Korvarikova, 2017). In partial fulfillment of my

graduate degree, I completed a literature review that utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore research related to the educational outcomes for youth in care, African Canadian disproportionalities and disparities in child welfare, and African Canadian disproportionalities and disparities in education; bringing awareness of the heightened disparities faced by Black youth in both the residential and educational sector.

Context

The research topic was picked due to the significant need of reforming the child welfare system (Harrison-Jackson, 2009; OACAS, 2016). Currently, there is a lack of research analyzing education within the residential sector across Ontario (Gharabaghi, 2011; Mintah, 2016; Snow, 2009). Moreover, research demonstrates that Black youth have low educational performance in comparison to youth of other races, and that this applies to Black youth in care (Clarke, 2011; Mintah, 2016; Harrison-Jackson, 2009). Little research, however, has specifically analyzed educational experiences of Black youth in care. As practitioners in Ontario, we are statistically likely to work with young Black people; I believe that CYCs can be a valuable resource for Black youth in both the child welfare and educational sector utilizing anti-oppressive practices, but they first need to be educated on current research surrounding this population to aid them in advocacy and navigating these oppressive institutions.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is a theoretical framework that challenges governing understandings of race, law, and systemic inequalities (Parker, 2015). Epistemologically, CRT has a centralized focus on race and racism, and values the experiential understandings of racialized people (Parker, 2015). CRT is an analytical framework in which one can thoroughly analyze systemic oppression and how it is maintained by institutional practices, including within the child welfare (Clarke, 2012) and education systems (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The main tenets of CRT that will inform this paper are permanence of racism (systemic and institutional racism), intersectionality, critique of liberalism/colour

blindness, anti-Black racism, and counter-storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker 2015). CRT aims to promote social justice as an emancipatory or transformative answer to racial, gender and class oppression of minority groups, and to aid in empowering the subordinated groups (Yosso, 2005; Clarke, 2012; Dunbar, Douglas, & Khalifa, 2013). The tenets and methodologies utilized within CRT are developed to reveal racial inequities and aid in analyzing complex racial concepts and privileges (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). Academics have looked to CRT as an epistemological and methodological resource to analyze inequities faced by minority groups within education and other institutions (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

One way in which systemic racism is manifested, is through inequities or differences between groups in outcomes, often referred to in literature as disproportionalities and disparities. "Disproportionate refers to the overrepresentation of a particular group of people in a particular program or system as compared to their representation in the general population" (Anti-Racism Directorate, 2017, p.52). While 'disparity' refers to unequal results of one group in relation to another (e.g. White groups in comparison with Black).

Black Youth in Child Welfare

In the Toronto area, Black children are being taken from their families and placed into foster care and group homes at a significantly higher rate than most other groups. Many parents, advocates, lawyers and service providers have noted a racial disproportion of Black children and youth apprehensions (e.g., Contenta, 2014). Forty-one percent of children and youth in Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) are identified as Black in comparison to 37% of the children and youth in CAST who are White (Contenta, 2014; OACAS, 2016). This raises concern about overrepresentation since Black youth represent roughly 2.9% of the overall population, and White youth are the majority demographic for youth under 18 (Nwankwo, 2009). Some estimates by the Ontario Association of Children Aid Society (OACAS) noted that Black Youth may represent up to 65% of the youth in group care (Clarke, 2011). Evidence suggests that Black children are more likely than

children of other races to experience out-of-home care, remain in care longer, and are less likely to be reunited with their families (Clarke, 2011; Foster 2012).

In terms of disparities, the report states that "Black children are 40% more likely to be investigated compared to White children, 18% more likely to be substantiated, 8% more likely to be transferred to ongoing services and 13% more likely to be placed in out of home care during the investigation" (Fallon *et al.*, 2013, p.5). Law enforcement and schools are the main contributors of CAS referrals, accounting for 40% of all referrals. Some experts believe that unconscious biases among these mandated referrers and among front line CAS practitioners ultimately contributes to increased apprehensions of Black children (Contenta, 2014). Historically, prior to the 1950s, Black children and youth specifically in America, have not been overrepresented in the child welfare system (Foster, 2012). In Canada, there is much less scholarship on history of African Canadians in child welfare, but some documented concerns since at least the early 1970s (OACAS, 2016). Black youth were systemically underrepresented in child welfare, as early interventions focused on rescuing White children and inclined to overlook African American children.

Educational Outcomes Amongst Black Youth in Care

Assessing the educational experience of youth residing in residential care is a difficult task due to the likelihood of them having multiple placements such as foster care, group home care, youth detention and psychiatric units (Gharabaghi, 2011; Kovarikova, 2017). Stability is a vital factor in determining educational performance for youth living in child welfare (Gharabaghi, 2011; Snow, 2009; Kovarikova, 2017). International research states that children in foster care are likely to have been moved twice throughout secondary school; a disruption that can impact their educational attainment outcomes (Harrison- Jackson, 2009). A great number of secondary school dropouts amongst youth who have aged out of the child welfare system was due to frequent school changes (Harrison-Jackson, 2009).

The most damaging risk factor for a youth's post-secondary attendance is living in care, with studies across Canada highlighting poor educational outcomes for youth in

care (Kovarikova, 2017). Youth who have not engaged with child welfare are 20 times more likely to attend college. In a recent study of youth leaving care in Ontario, Kovarikova (2017) reported that "being a former foster child is a significantly larger obstacle to post-secondary achievement than is living in a low-income family, being a first-generation newcomer student or being a particular gender or race alone" (p.9). In Ontario, only 44% of youth in care graduate from secondary school in comparison to 81% of their classmates (Kovarikova, 2017). This does not mean that being in care is the cause of these outcomes; but suggests that care is a related factor in respect to these outcomes. Gharabaghi (2011) completed a synthesis of the literature pertaining to the educational experience of youth living in residential group care in Ontario, and reported that familial dilemmas, race, the interjection of child welfare services, and school problems are all interconnected (Gharabaghi, 2011; Harrison-Jackson, 2009).

Ontario currently does not have any policies that aim at endorsing educational participation in group care settings (Gharabaghi, 2011). Although the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2017) has recently developed the "Blueprint for Building a New System of Licensed Residential Services," licensing does not analyze education outside of plan of cares of discharge documentations (Gharabaghi, 2011). Research highlights that creating an environment of learning within the home greatly improves school functioning, and that a caregiver's participations in a child or youth's education is a significant contributing factor to success (Gharabaghi, 2011).

Research demonstrates that Black youth generally have lower educational performances in comparison to children of other races, whether they are involved with child welfare or not (Clarke, 2011; Harrison-Jackson, 2009; Mintah, 2016). Structural racism and disparities in quality of care and outcomes are apparent within the child welfare system. Black youth in care who are facing overt racism are significantly at risk of doing poorly in school due to the lack of supports both within the child welfare and educational system. Generally, group care staff in the Ontario workforce have child and youth care diplomas from community colleges; roughly 6% of the workers do not have any post-secondary education, and the respective agencies trainings for professional development within the group care have no emphasis on promoting education amongst

young people in care (Gharabaghi, 2011). The proportion of CYC qualified staff is much higher in child mental health residential services than in private residential services. Black youth are underrepresented in the former, and hugely overrepresented in the latter; meaning that Black youth would experience a very high percentage of workers who have no or limited post- secondary education (Gharabaghi, Trocmé & Newman, 2016). This demonstrates that current policies and practices disproportionately impact Black youth.

Disproportionalities and Disparities in Education

Discriminatory educational experiences for specific social groups have been rooted in Ontario's education system since its creation (Parekh, Killoran, & Crawford, 2011). Research shows that poor minority groups were likely to be streamed out of academia and into low performing and low paying jobs (Parekh *et al.,* 2011). Cultural and historical perspectives are important in addressing the impact of political and societal factors on adolescent educational, social and emotional development (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015).

Unfortunately, current literature indicates that racial/ethnic discrimination and institutional racism are common experiences for Black youth in schools and other public settings (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Nicolas *et al*., 2008). Research has noted that teachers tend to give lower grades and utilize harsher disciplinary actions against Black students than White students (Hoggard, Byrd & Sellers, 2012). Young Black people often start school engaged and interested in learning but due to various factors within the school setting, they become less engaged by the time they reach adolescence (Harper & Davis, 2012; Hargrove & Seay, 2011). One of the contributing factors is the awareness by Black children and youth that they are being treated unfairly by White teachers (Hargrove & Seay, 2011). The devaluing of Black students throughout history is a barrier within the school system that hinders Black students' academic successes.

Many instructors aim to facilitate a "cultural blindness" to their teaching styles, but this has perpetuated systemic racism. The inability to work with cultural differences in a solution focused manner to ensure equity for all learners, is one of the educational systems failures. Dei (2008) argues that the commonly used colour blind approaches

continue to reproduce Whiteness and normalizes racism in society, specifically in the classroom. Indicators of institutional discrimination within the school milieu include low expectations for students of colour, less qualified teachers, absence of African American teachers, and limited access to higher-level courses (Nicolas et al., 2008; Hargrove & Seay, 2011; Dei, 2008).

Many authors speak about the lack of Black male figures in academia as a result of systematic discrimination; these barriers ultimately perpetuate this same narrative (Dei 2008; Barnstead, 2008; Hargrove & Seay, 2011; Nicolas *et al*., 2008; Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015). "Experiencing discrimination has been shown to have a range of deleterious effects on Black youth. This includes undermining academic achievement and psychological adjustment" (Hope *et al*., 2015, p.85). Scholars suggest school highlights broader societal issues of inequities and race-based discriminatory practices (Hope *et al*., 2015).

Protective Factors

This section is a review of literature related to factors that protect Black children and youth against adversity to promote positive outcomes within the educational and child welfare system.

Youth Participation

Participation can be an emancipatory tool for Black youth to overcome intersecting marginalizations of, age, ability, race, and gender. Hindering young Black people's rights to be heard stifles their ability to participate meaningfully and can lead to heightening overall risk (Ginwright & James, 2002; Hill, Davis, Prout, & Tisdall., 2004; Horwath, Kalyva, & Spyru, 2012). A youth perspective in the development of policy is valuable because areas of importance to adults, do not always reflect what is meaningful to young people. Understanding the needs of Black youth is only authentically done through shared dialogue with adults who have the power to make change (Hill *et al*., 2004).

The issue of youth voice and participation has become central in recent policy developments in Ontario. In June 2017, The Government of Ontario passed *Bill 89*, a

revision of the (former) Child and Family Services Act that governs child welfare and youth justice services (Couteau, 2017). The new Act places greater emphasis on youth voice, and requires social workers assessing a young person's circumstance to consider what is in the best interests of the youth from their own perspective, in addition to considering specifics about their: race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, family diversity, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (Couteau, 2017). Though this Bill is a positive movement for youth in the child welfare movement, more participatory action and engagement from young people is needed in all aspect related to their lives.

Child and Youth Care Workers/Practitioners

Mentorship has been identified as an important protective factor for vulnerable youth, particularly Black youth (e.g., Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010). Though the research did not specifically mention CYCs, we offer adult mentor relationships to infants, children and youth that are focused on promoting positive development in settings such as community-based child and youth programs, family support, school-based programs, mental health, child welfare, clinical settings, and juvenile justice programs (Mattingly, 2010). Practitioners understand the importance of utilizing a developmental ecological perspective that accentuates the relationship between the young people and their physical, social, cultural and political settings; in CYC practice this is often conceptualized as "life space interventions" (Redl, 1959; Gharabaghi & Stuart 2013).

Afrocentric Schools

The first Afrocentric Alternative School (AAS) in Canada opened in September 2009, but had been put into practice already across the United States (Thompson & Wallner, 2011; CBC News, 2015). Its direct goal was to reduce dropout rates and underachievement of Black students (CBC News, 2015). The "centricity" utilized in Afrocentric schools is the perspective that gives student the opportunity to learn about their own culture so they can better understand other cultural perspectives. Afrocentric pedagogy promotes students to view themselves as the subject of interest, as opposed to

utensils of education; allowing them not only to observe the educational process but to be key members within it (Thompson & Wallner, 2011).

Conclusion

Black youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system within Canada which reflects broader systemic racism faced by Black Canadians. Government officials, policy makers and people who hold relevant power must utilize the voice of the oppressed groups in creating legislations which impact their lives. There is a need for urgency to be placed on this issue as people of colour continue to live with subpar care and education within Ontario today.

Connections and implications for Child and Youth Care Practice

The CYC professional practice has establish underlying attitudes for professional work, including (but not limited to) individuality, community, culture and human diversity (Mattingly, 2010). In the North American context, CYCs have addressed covert colonial practices as a profession, usually adopting multiculturalism and colour blindness approaches (Skott-Myhre, 2017). Although this is a noble cause, some CYCs are questioning the validity of a discourse which perpetuates the same injustices it seeks to resolve; the CYC profession is predominantly White at all ranks (Gharabaghi 2017). The CYC practice areas are predominantly White; the practice at schools, child welfare, post-secondary education (some exceptions in this context), clinical, and policy makers (those who control the enhancement of the discourse), are established under a substantially White social context (Gharabaghi 2017; Skott-Myhre, 2017).

Theoretically, CYC can be a valuable resource for Black youth in a variety of milieus utilizing anti-racist practices, but if practitioners are unable to be aware that some children and youth may find the dominant whiteness oppressive, to a degree which a White practitioner cannot comprehend or often denies, they cannot truly engage in authentic relational practices (Skott-Myhre, 2017).

Although educational CYC programs are creating or re-configuring courses on diversity, anti-racism and anti-oppression, none of these suggestions and initiatives

contest the discourse to diversify the predominantly White framework in which CYC practice (institutions, policies, structures) ultimately maintains social inequity (Gharabaghi, 2017). Skott-Myhre (2017) cites DiAngelo (2017) and proposes that CYCs need to be less accepting of terms like multi-culturalism and colour blindness, and more accepting of terms like White supremacy as it helps reflect on where the issues of racial inequity began and is preserved. Gharabaghi (2017) suggests that until CYC substructure has recruited members of the racialized community (Indigenous and Black) and allow students and young people to spread their voices in the field to challenge the predominant "Whiteness", professional regulation should be set aside. Though this may be true, this does not solve the current crisis of Black youth working with a vast amount of under-qualified staff, putting them at immediate greater risk. I propose that the field needs to place urgency in congruently solving its current "colonial" infrastructure by hiring more people of different races, while ensuring practitioners are trained and have additional knowledge on anti-racist practices, mitigating the issue of unqualified practitioners working with vulnerable young people across Ontario.

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"It's extremely difficult when nobody's listening to you": Learning from relocation stories of Indigenous girls in foster care

Cheryl Inkster and Amy Parent

Abstract

This study uses an Indigenous Storywork methodology and a Métis Beadwork methodology to invite Indigenous youth who identify as female to share their experiences of relocation while in foster care. The research findings are analyzed through Blackstock's Breath of Life Theory and reveal the themes of disruption and difficult transitions; and the temporal implications of relocation for Indigenous youth in care. The important connection to family and culture as a determinant of health is discussed in relation to the participants experiences. The findings highlight the urgent need for the Government of Canada to end the humanitarian crisis for Indigenous children in Canada by enacting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Implications for child welfare policy and practice are discussed, emphasizing the urgent need for child welfare policies to consider children and youth within the context of their family and community.

Keywords
Indigenous Child welfare and policy, Child protection, Indigenous children, relocation, Storywork, Métis Beadwork

Introduction: Locating Ourselves

We begin by raising our hands to show our deep appreciation to the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations for providing us with a place to live, study and teach, and acknowledge that we are "uninvited guests" (Kellipio, personal communication, November, 2017) on their traditional, ancestral, unceded, and overlapping territories.

My name is Cheryl Inkster. My father's side of the family is Métis and from the original Métis and Scottish settlements along the Red River in Manitoba. I am also of Polish, Ukrainian, and Dutch descent. For my graduate work, I investigated the tensions that I experienced navigating my former role as a youth worker who attempted to assist Indigenous youth to adapt to their new environment and preserve connections with their home communities. I would like to thank the youth who participated in this research as well as Elder Scholar Dr. Richard Vedan for his guidance.

My name is Amy Parent and my Nisga'a name is Noxs Ts'aawit (Mother of the Raven Warrior Chief). My mother's side of the family is Nisga'a from the House of Ni'isjoohl and we belong to the Ganada (frog clan). On my father's side, I am French Canadian and German. I am an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University and had the pleasure to work with Cheryl during her graduate work.

Our collaboration for this article is a small effort to support the tireless work of Indigenous youth activists (Shannen Koostachin, Kendra Levi-Paul, Ta'kaiya Blaney) and our colleagues (Blackstock, 2010, Johnson, 2011; Bezanson, 2018; Foster, 2018) by adding our voices to the urgent call for the Government of Canada to end the humanitarian crisis for Indigenous children in care.

Displacement and relocation are experiences that occur all over the world, but little attention is paid to the experiences of relocation among Indigenous youth residing in Canada (Berman et al., 2009). Relocation experiences represent a turning point in a person's life and have considerable consequences for Indigenous people's mental health, identity, and social networks (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012). This article presents the findings of a graduate study on the relocation experiences among Indigenous youth who identify as female in the Canadian foster care system that have been relocated to the Lower

Mainland from rural northern communities (Inkster, 2017). The following sub question was selected for this article: What stories do female youth narrate as important in their relocation process? The stories that were gathered from this question are analyzed in relation to the Breath of Life Theory discussed below. Children play an important role within Indigenous worldviews and we encourage readers to be open to what the girls in this study have to share.

Breath of Life Theoretical Application

The Breath of Life Theory (BOL) developed by leading Indigenous child and youth advocate, Cindy Blackstock (Gitxsan Nation), is applied and discussed in relation to the research findings. BOL is an emerging theory that builds on First Nations ontology (Blackstock, 2007; Blackstock, 2009) and the theory of everything (TOE) in physics (Blackstock, 2009). There is diversity among Indigenous cultures that cannot specifically be captured in BOL as it draws on the general character of First Nations knowledge. However, there are commonalities. First Nations ontology is the result of the teachings and experiences of Indigenous peoples which are dynamic, context specific, and based on generations of wisdom that have been passed down through oral tradition (Battiste, 2002). BOL suggests that a theory of everything for humanity should be explored in western theoretical scholarship and Indigenous child welfare scholarship and practice (Blackstock, 2011). Due to the holistic nature of theory of everything principles, it is a better match for First Nations ontology than other Western social science theories such as: ecological theory, anti-oppressive approaches, and structural theory (Blackstock, 2009). Blackstock explains the connection that she draws between BOL and the TOE:

There are significant differences between First Nations and western worldviews particularly in relation to time, interconnection of reality, and the First Nations belief that simple principles often explain complex phenomena such as the universe or humanity. Physics' theory of everything departs from the ontological norms underlying many western social science theories by proposing that all matter and time in the universe can be explained by a small set of interdependent physical principles set at precise values (p. 73).

BOL works with the relational worldview principles developed by Cross (1997) to categorize the four domains of cognitive, physical, spiritual, and emotional. The relational worldview principles allow for an interconnected reality, expansive concepts of time by acknowledging the importance of ancestral knowledge, and multiple dimensions of reality (Blackstock, 2011). Time, culture, and context are assumed to shape the principles and explain the diversity in human experience. BOL basic premise is "that structural risks affecting children's safety and well-being are alleviated when the relational worldview principles are in balance within the context and culture of the community" (Blackstock, 2011, p. 2). BOL is applied to the culture and context of the participants experiences of relocation. As Indigenous researchers working with Indigenous methodologies, we see the BOL theory as being thoroughly intertwined with our methodology.

Literature Review: Indigenous Communities and Child Welfare in Canada

Indigenous children are overrepresented in the Canadian child welfare system (Fluke et al., 2010; Galley, 2010; Tait et al., 2013). According to the most recent Census (Statistics Canada, 2016), Indigenous children under 14 make up less than 7.7% of all Canadian Children but comprise 52.2% of all children in foster care (Government of Canada, 2018). Large numbers of Indigenous children are raised away from their families, culture, and communities due to being placed in non-Indigenous foster care and adoption placements (Tait et al., 2013). The term foster care includes placing children in the care of families, group homes, or residential settings (Pecora et al., 2010). A report by the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth (2017) states, "Indigenous children and youth comprise 64 per cent of all children and youth in care in B.C." (p. 4). While in the Northwest Territories (NWT), an annual report from the Director of Child and Family Services (2017) notes 79% of Indigenous child placements were within their communities for the 2016-2017 year (Government of Northwest Territories, 2017). The exact number of Indigenous children in care that are relocated to the Lower Mainland was not publicly available.

The latest wave of Indigenous children in care have now been referred to as the "millennial scoop" (Foster, 2018) and like previous generations of Indigenous children

and families they continue to be deeply impacted by Canadian colonial policies of state sanctioned violence. Historically, the Indian Residential School System (IRSS) operated in Canada from 1831-1996 by leading religious institutions and the Government of Canada. These schools aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into a Eurocentric worldview (Duran and Duran, 1995), as part of a larger agenda of cultural genocide aimed at dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their lands and culture (de Leeuw, 2009; Bhandar, 2016). Residential schools are no longer in operation in Canada, but it is estimated 150,000 children attended residential schools (Miller and Marshall, 2012). Later, in the 1960s, the "Sixties Scoop" followed where larger numbers of Indigenous children were forcibly placed into state care or adoption by non-Indigenous families, often without consent from their families (Sinclair, 2007).

Recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada was established in 2008 and the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) was put in place to begin addressing the negative effects of this history. In 2016, Canada officially adopted the UNDRIP and its forty-six articles that apply to Indigenous peoples. The TRC was created to inform people about the history and impact of the Indian Residential School systems (TRC, 2012). The commission documented the experiences of those affected by the experience of Indian Residential Schools and prepared a final report and 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) which will be discussed further in the discussion section.

There are currently more Indigenous children in the Canadian child welfare system than there were in the height of residential schools (Bennett, 2016). This is due to historical and intergenerational events and trauma that is pervasive and contributes to the conditions and challenges in many Indigenous communities today (Campbell and Evans-Campbell, 2011). Collective trauma has been experienced by many Indigenous communities and traumatic experiences are often generationally transmitted, affecting the children and grandchildren of those originally traumatized (Bombay et al., 2009). The intergenerational trauma that was created from the IRSS continues and is extended into the child welfare system (TRC, 2015; *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, Assembly of First Nations v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2016). If the status

quo of the child welfare system in Canada does not change, the number of First Nations children in care will continue to rise (Blackstock, 2008; Johnston and Tester, 2014).

One response to the number of Indigenous children in care has been the implementation and support of Jordan's Principle which is a principle used in Canada to resolve disputes in jurisdictions or between governments regarding the payment of government services for First Nations children and emphasizes the importance of putting children first at the center of child welfare practices (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2018). The principle is named after five-year-old Jordan River Anderson from Norway House Cree Nation who died while waiting to receive treatment due to a financial responsibility dispute between the federal and provincial governments. Jordan's Principle is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (non-discrimination) and Canadian domestic law (no differential treatment on the basis of race). Canada is legally responsible for Jordan's Principle. In June 2015, the third of the TRC Calls to Action urged the Government of Canada to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

Relocation

Relocation involves the loss of "home" and the disruption of social ties. There are few Canadian studies on the experience of uprooting on girls (Berman et al., 2009). Youth are relocated from remote northern communities in Canada to the Lower Mainland, an urban centre in B.C. In this study, relocation is defined as a process which unfolds over time and not just the event of moving. Relocation involves the physical relocation, displacement, spiritual dislocation, and cultural transition from Indigenous northern reserve communities to urban non-Indigenous dominant culture communities.

Girls' knowledge is rarely included in research and policies that affect them and colonial institutions have treated Indigenous females very differently than males (de Finney, 2014), particularly when examining the impacts of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada (Razack, 2016; Smylie and Cywink, 2016; Savarese, 2017). In Canada, the results of the Indian Act disproportionately disadvantaged and continues to disadvantage Indigenous women (Bourassa et al., 2004) in areas of band

membership criteria, land ownership, reproductive health, and being objects of or excluded from research (Bourassa et al., 2004; 2014; Smith, 1999). For these reasons, researching female Indigenous young people's experiences of relocation within the child welfare system is essential.

Methods

Ethics Approval

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from both Simon Fraser University's (SFU) Research Ethics Board (REB) and the selected community agency's Research Committee. The project adhered to research and privacy related requirements in provincial and federal legislation. Consent and assent were addressed with extra care and due to the potentially upsetting nature of the subject and interviews were structured for safety.

Indigenous Storywork/Métis Beadwork Methodology

Indigenous methodologies centre Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in the knowledge making process, address the educational, cultural, social, and political priorities of engaging Indigenous communities in research, and play a pivotal role in the decolonization and self-determination processes underway in Indigenous communities (Parent, 2014). This study's design was guided by Indigenous research methodologies, particularly through Sto:lo scholar, Jo-ann Archibald's Storywork methodology (2008; Archibald & Parent, 2019) and a Métis beadwork methodology (Inkster, 2017).

Archibald (2008) developed seven Storywork principles (respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy) to create a Coast Salish methodological framework for making meaning from First Nations stories in education and research contexts. Story research should enable people to meaningfully talk about their Indigenous knowledge which can be "effectively used for education and for living a good life and to think about possibilities for overcoming problems experienced in their communities" (Archibald, 2008, p. 81). It is for these reasons that storytellers were

invited to share their personal life experience stories of relocation. Elder Scholar, Richard Vedan (Secwepemc First Nation), who is an Associate Professor Emeritus from the University of British Columbia's School of Social Work was also invited to support our Storywork process to ensure that our work maintained high ethical standards.

A Métis beadwork methodology was developed to complement our Storywork methodology. Cheryl felt it was important to detail her personal journey of reconnecting with Métis culture through her process of learning beadwork. Cheryl connected with Métis artist and knowledge holder Lisa Shepherd to guide her understandings of Métis beadwork and apply related beadwork teachings to the research process (article forthcoming). Beaded figures are used in the findings to provide visual representation to the analysis process. The beadwork process follows the interconnected phases of analysis that Cheryl worked through to create meaning from the stories. The Breath of Life theory helps to breathe life into the beadwork methodology by creating space for the girls to share their stories. Combining both Storywork and Métis beadwork methodologies ensured the cultural values of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence were carefully woven throughout the entire process and connected to the Breath of Life Theory and research design.

Inviting their Stories

Storytellers were recruited through a Lower Mainland community agency that provides residential care for Indigenous youth from northern rural communities. The following criteria were used for eligibility to participate: (a) be between age 11 to 25; (b) female; (c) self-identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit); (c) residing in a residential care placement; (d) relocated from a northern rural community to the Lower Mainland as a youth in care.

Four open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with four female youth/storytellers, Kayla, Ashley, Farah, and Jade (pseudonyms). Storytellers were 11 to 18-years-old and they all lived in separate homes within the same community agency program. The time the girls had spent in the Lower Mainland ranged from one and a half to four years. Some storytellers did not share exactly which community they relocated from in the

Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada. Some shared that they relocated from Yellowknife and the Dene community of Behchokǫ̀, also known as Rae-Edzo. Behchokǫ̀ had a population count of 1,874 according to the 2016 census (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Yellowknife is the capital city and largest community in the Northwest Territories. Rae and Edzo are sister communities located 110km away from Yellowknife, NWT.

Knowledge Holder Interviews

Knowledge holder interviews were conducted prior to meeting with the girls to learn contextual information and to guide the study. The first professional knowledge holder interview conducted was with an employee from a Lower Mainland social service agency that the storytellers were involved with. The second professional knowledge holder interview conducted was with the Director of Social Programs from the Department of Health and Social Services within the government of the Northwest Territories. A third knowledge holder interview was conducted for personal and cultural reasons to support the development of a Métis beadwork methodology. To privilege the voices of the storytellers in this article, the informant interviews will only be used in circumstances where further contextual information is needed.

Analysis (Meaning Making)

Archibald's (2008) Storywork principles informed the meaning making and interpretation of the girls' stories. We connected with the stories of the girls emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually (Archibald, 2008). Being present in interactions with storytellers by talking, listening, and feeling as well as meditating on their stories after the interviews helped to form some thematic notions that were later verified by the text of their transcripts (Archibald, 2008). Stories were audio recorded and transcribed. Nvivo software was used to assist with managing the stories and creating initial demographic codes. The interview transcriptions were broken down into episodes. A timeline of events for each storyteller was drawn to aid in understanding the stories. Themes were generated for each individual interview and across interviews.

BOL theory was applied to the analysis in the final stages to develop a cohesive interconnected understanding between the personal stories that the girls shared and larger structural policies and contexts that shape Indigenous child welfare practices.

Findings: Stories of Leaving, Arriving and Adjusting

The girls' stories revealed three major aspects of the relocation process for Indigenous female youth in foster care relocating from the Northwest Territories to the Lower Mainland: leaving, arriving, and adjusting. Within these aspects, the themes are further developed with beaded figures to illustrate each section. Small pieces of contextual information are provided from the professional knowledge holder interviews and are woven throughout these sections.

Leaving

The first theme that developed was *leaving*. A professional knowledge holder interview revealed recent changes that have influenced the relocation of Northwest Territories children and youth to British Columbia's Lower Mainland. The Director of Social Programs shared that the population served in the Northwest Territories has a "large range of needs, a fairly limited pool of people, and a relatively small budget." He also shared that the treatment facility in the Northwest Territories was shut down which led to children and youth being sent out of territory for treatment (See Figure 1).

Youth Background of Prior Disruptions

Young girls who relocate to the Lower Mainland experience many challenging life events and disruptions prior to being relocated. Ashley, Kayla, Jade, and Farah all described adverse events prior to moving to the Lower Mainland. Altogether, they shared stories about being in foster care, running away, attending school, accessing treatment, and instances of incarceration before moving to British Columbia. One participant went to jail and her story is unique in this aspect. Storytellers' ages ranged from eight years old to sixteen years old when they first found out they would move to BC.

Forced Move, No Choice, and Disruptive

Most storytellers described a lack of choice around the decision to move to the Lower Mainland from their home communities. Some storytellers described feeling forced to move because of a lack of options. Other storytellers shared they felt forced because the move was not presented as a choice. Kayla shared, "It was more like you're going, there's no questions asked. We have to force you to move." Another storyteller shared, "I really didn't have a choice kind of because I didn't want to sit in jail." Some storytellers also mentioned that the move to the Lower Mainland was disruptive to their lives and relationships, with the timing of departure rarely being chosen by the girls. Kayla shared, "Nobody actually told me that I was moving, I think a few days before, my foster parent he came up to me and was like Kayla you're moving". Storytellers described being told by either their social workers or their foster parents.

Figure 1: Leaving Themes

Arriving

The second theme that developed was *arriving*. Professional knowledge holder interviews revealed that once youth arrive in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, they

meet a whole new team of unfamiliar care providers. Most storytellers boarded multiple flights to travel approximately 2,300 kilometers, from Yellowknife to Vancouver, often accompanied by a worker they had just met. On arrival, they are accompanied to their new foster home but remain under the official guardianship of the Northwest Territories government (See Figure 2).

Confusion over people, place, and information overload

Many storytellers described that it was hard to adjust to a new place. Storytellers discussed several areas that it was difficult to adjust to including people and place, amount of new information, school, land and climate, language, and culture. Jade shared, "I was confused where I was 'cause I never heard of this place before." She continued, "BC's a huge, huge place and you can get like lost pretty easy." Many storytellers described not knowing where they were or who they were with when they moved to the Lower Mainland. Jade shared, "you move into a new place and you don't know who they are or where you are. So, you really don't know where you are and just, and you get, and you get scared." Storytellers shared of feeling rushed and described dealing with an overwhelming amount of new information when they arrived in the Lower Mainland.

School

Young girls who relocate to the Lower Mainland from the Northwest Territories go through school disruption and difficulty adjusting to new school settings. Most storytellers had attended several schools before moving to the Lower Mainland due to moving around in foster care, accessing treatment, or being incarcerated. Several storytellers shared that once they started attending school in the Lower Mainland, it was hard to adjust. Jade shared, "school was hard. What we learned, we didn't learn that. Well we do Math but not the kind of Math that we do here now. It's just, it's just so hard." Another storyteller discussed the size of the classes as difficult to adjust to. Kayla shared:

I thought moving schools was very hard. Moving from one school to the next, from your hometown to here and going from a school that's not very big to a school that is huge and, I don't know, I thought that was really hard to like transition to.

Storytellers experienced the transition to new schools, with distinct curriculum and much larger class sizes as both challenging and alienating. Although school adjustments were challenging, there were differences among the stories, with transitions being the key challenge.

Culture loss

Young girls who relocate to the Lower Mainland from the Northwest Territories experience shifts in their connection to their culture. All storytellers described changes to their cultural connections through the process of relocating to the Lower Mainland. Storytellers shared of changes to their sense of community, connection to family, loss of traditional language (through course work in school and in the family home) and relationship with the land, and cultural practices and ceremonies. For most of the youth this meant significant loss and feelings of disconnection from their culture.
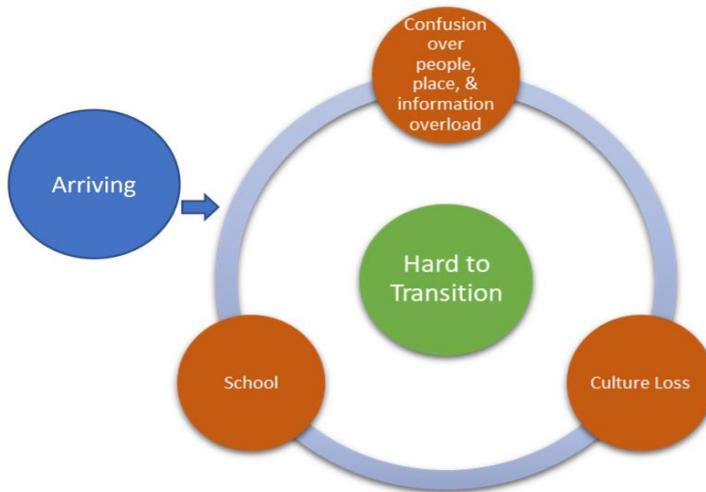
Figure 2: Arriving Themes

Adjusting

The final theme that developed was an *adjustment period* that was seen as a necessary part of the process for the storytellers who were relocated to the Lower Mainland (see Figure 3). The storytellers experienced adjusting over time to cultural changes, shifts in their attitudes towards being relocated, and school experiences. Additionally, storytellers shared things they learned over time through their experience of relocation.

Changes and Learnings over Time

Most storytellers reflected on their attitude towards moving to the Lower Mainland. Surprisingly, all storytellers shared how they looked back and viewed their relocation to the Lower Mainland as helpful despite contradictory reflections of reported negative behavioural changes (see below). Storytellers who were older shared how their attitude towards relocating had changed. One storyteller who has been living in the Lower Mainland for almost four years shared:

> At first, I don't know, I got pretty angry for a while, I wasn't really a happy kid, but after like a couple months, or a few months, I realized this was for the better so then I kind of like, I was okay with it and then now, I don't know, I think it was like a really good move and I don't regret it, at all. *(Kayla)*

There were also changes that occurred for the youth over time that ranged according to each storyteller. Some youth experienced positive changes that included: learning to trust, seeking help in treatment, and developing a growing set of helpful life skills that were attributed to their relocation. One youth noted that the move assisted her to "grow out of thug life". This storyteller had been in custody a few times over her relocation process.

However, there were also negative behavioural changes reported by some storytellers. Jade shared how she noticed her temperament and appetite changed when she relocated to the Lower Mainland. She shared, "for some reason I got a little bit

meaner...I wasn't like mean at all when I was at Rae but ... when I moved to BC, I started grow mean. I don't know why." Jade shared, "My appetite. I barely eat much...Now I'm really picky." Jade compared this to when she lived in the north and she shared, "I wasn't picky at all."

School

Many storytellers reflected on their experience of attending school in the Lower Mainland over the years. Storytellers described aspects of their school experiences as valuable. Many storytellers shared that their experiences attending school had improved. Kayla shared, "It made me more open to possibilities, and I think for education wise." Several storytellers shared that they were attending school more since moving to the Lower Mainland and several shared how they were going to graduate that year. One storyteller shared about changing her mind about school. She stated, "I changed my thought of dropping out." This storyteller had attended different schools in treatment and in custody and had previously decided to drop out of school when she was off probation.
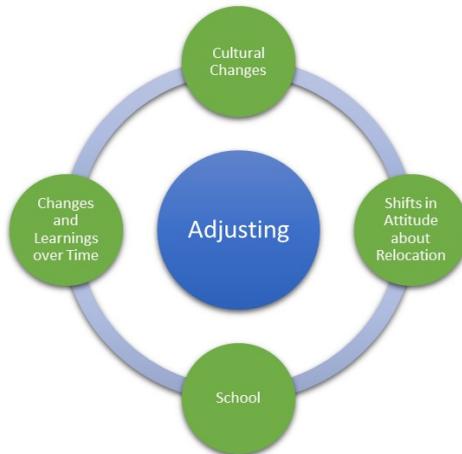
Figure 3: Adjusting Themes

Discussion

The findings suggest that young women who are relocated while in foster care experience disruption, difficult transitions, and minimal benefits over time.
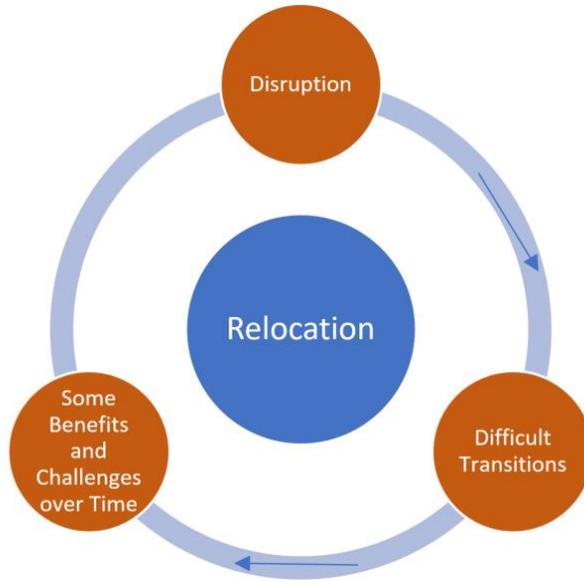
Figure 4: The relocation process

Applying Breath of Life Theory (Blackstock, 2011) to the stories of the Indigenous girls who were relocated while in foster care demonstrates they endured risks to their safety because the principles for personal and collective holistic well-being (Cross, 1997) are not attended to within the current practice of relocation. BOL theory suggests that "child welfare interventions geared toward restoring balance among the relational worldview model's principles will result in optimal safety and well-being for the community and their children" (Blackstock, 2011, p. 3). Further, optimal well-being can only be achieved when

the four principles are balanced at individual, family (including past and future generations), and collective levels (Blackstock, 2011). The removal of the girls in this study demonstrates the individual focus of interventions. The stories revealed that the decision to relate the girls did not involve attention to balance in the four domains (physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive). Further, removing the girls from their home communities neglected the family and collective supports that are essential for optimal well-being when considering relational worldview principles and BOL theory.

The girls' stories revealed that leaving their home communities was forced, disruptive, and it was difficult to adjust. This theme of force and disruption parallels the experiences of residential school survivors and their experiences being taken from their families and placed in residential schools. Through hearing the girls' stories in this study, it is evident that forced relocation and disruption continues to occur for Indigenous people. The girls accounts help make connections such as how previous Indigenous communities were forcefully dispossessed from their traditional lands and relocated to places that were unfamiliar such as reserves or inhospitable places for the sake of government convenience (Duran and Duran, 1995; Glenn, 2011). The youth in this study shared that most of their cultural needs were neglected. Having youth access services out of province disconnects them from important requirements for balance, family and culture (Nayar, 2014). Survivors of residential school were also disconnected from family and culture and this affected the healing process for many of them (Nayar, 2014). The literature echoes this reality while pointing to the importance of connection to family and culture as critical to building resilience and fostering healing (Walls and Whitbeck, 2012; Tait et al., 2013; Nayar, 2014; Snyder and Wilson, 2015).

Surprisingly the storytellers detailed some benefits as well as some challenges to adjusting to living in the Lower Mainland. However, the temporal implications of relocation must also be taken into consideration alongside the storytellers' deep resilience and ability to assimilate into an urban colonial environment. Professional knowledge holder interviews revealed that most youth who are relocated will not return home due to a lack of resources in the Northwest Territories.

In hearing the girls' stories and connecting their stories to the BOL, it is important to identify current legislation and policies that can support positive transformative change for Indigenous children in Canada. For example, several articles in the UNDRIP (2007) contrast with what is occurring through the relocation of Indigenous children in Canada. These articles include Article 7.2 states (forceful removal of children), Article 8.1 (forced assimilation or destruction of culture), Article 8.2a (depriving cultural values), Article 10 (removed from land and option of return), Article 11 and 12 (practice cultural traditions), Article 13.1 (transmit language), Article 14.3 (access to education in own language), Article 21.2 (improve social conditions for children), Article 24.2 (highest standard of physical and mental health), Article 25 and 26.1 (relationship with land), Article 31 (maintain and develop cultural expression), and Article 33 (identity). The TRC Calls to Action (2015) include recommendations for the Government of Canada to fully adopt and implement the UNDRIP. UNDRIP outlines that these are the minimum standards that should be followed for well-being and survival, causing us to question Canada's response since adopting the declaration in 2016.

The TRC (2012) and its Calls to Action (2015) also stand out as important for this study. The section on child welfare discusses keeping children in culturally appropriate placements "regardless of where they reside" (Action 1.2, p. 5). This causes alarm about the cultural appropriateness of the homes of the girls in this study. Action 1.5 (2015) accentuates the importance of understanding the legacy of residential schools and causes us to question what needs to be done to make sure that Indigenous children in care do not continue to be removed from their families, communities, and connection to their culture? How can the BOL shift child welfare interventions to focus on restoring balance among the relational worldview principles instead of over-focusing on the imbalance that manifests at the level of individual children and families?

Storyteller and professional knowledge holder interviews revealed differences in the education opportunities in the Northwest Territories compared with the education opportunities and supports in the Lower Mainland. The TRC Action 8 specifically addresses discrepancies in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on and off reserves. Storytellers shared that relocating to the Lower Mainland

prevented them from speaking and learning their languages. Storytellers' experiences of losing their languages, combined with the TRC Calls to Action (2015) points to the urgent need to preserve and provide more government funding for education and language revitalization opportunities for Indigenous youth in care.

These contradictions point to the issues that have been noted by numerous scholars about the inability of a neoliberal framework to support the public arena and social goods (Bezanson, 2010; Haly, 2010; Liebenberg et al., 2015; Howard-Wagner, 2018). In a neoliberal framework, responsibility for well-being is placed on the individual in Western democracies which is counter to the interdependencies and interconnected relationships that are vital to the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous families, communities, and social institutions. Responsibility in Indigenous communities is often considered a shared endeavor amongst individuals, families, and governing structures. However, service providers in child welfare, mental health, and corrections sectors operate under a neoliberal ideology (Liebenberg et al., 2015) that negates a social context and focuses attention on the individuals and their ability to manage their own risks (which may lead to them not receiving the support they need). The profit based discursive effects of neoliberal policy framework significantly impact the lives of people. In this case, the lives of Indigenous girls have been placed at great cost to contemporary beneficiaries of a colonial system (white, privileged forms of hetero-patriarchal power). Further, with issues such as sexism and misogyny continuing to affect and damage communities, how can these storytellers' voices and the voices of other Indigenous girls transform past and present legislation and practices that have negatively impacted the lives of Indigenous women (Ramirez, 2007)? At the time of writing this paper, the Canadian Liberal government has continued to delay making changes to providing services for Indigenous children. In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's ruling found that the federal government provides "inequitable and insufficient" services for Indigenous children (Ostroff, 2017).

Scope, Limitations and Future Research

In Metis beadwork, the teaching of the "spirit bead" relates to the limitations of this study as it teaches us to place one bead in each project that does not fit with the pattern, a wrong bead to keep someone humble and remember that nothing is perfect. Like every beadwork project, there are limitations to this study.

The youth originated from several diverse Indigenous communities in the NWT and not all youth detailed their community of origin. As a result, we were unable to fully define the relational worldview principles and develop culturally based measures for each principle in the BOL theory (Blackstock, 2011). Nor did we feel it was our place to do so because we are not from the storytellers' communities. Further research is needed to determine culturally appropriate mechanisms for restoring well-being in each of the girl's home communities.

There were four youth involved in this study due to budget and time constraints and it is not reasonable to generalize the findings of this study to other relocated populations of youth in care (i.e. boys, two-spirit youth, or youth with other identities).

Recommendations and Implications for Child and Youth Care Practitioners

Applying BOL requires a reconfiguration of child maltreatment policies to include the ancestral experience of the child and the intergenerational impacts to future generations before a removal could occur rather than a narrow, individualized focus. This would require a stringent examination of community and policy issues that contribute to the high number of youth in care and the practice of removing them from their communities.

In considering BOL's expansive concept of time "where the past, present, and future are mutually reinforcing" (Blackstock, 2011 p. 6), a helpful practice is to consider how will the on-going practice of forceful removal of Indigenous children affect the next seven generations? How can child maltreatment assessments consider the past and ancestral experiences of the child in relation to the consequences of intervention (Blackstock, 2011)?

Further work needs to continue to see that the TRC's Calls to Action and UNDRIP be formally implemented into child removal procedures. For example, including the Calls to

Action and UNDRIP as part of formal assessments or interventions with Indigenous families.

This article centers the lived experiences of Indigenous youth and its findings are directly applicable to the daily experiences of Child and Youth Care (CYC) workers. In order to create relational safety (Garfat, 2016), Indigenous youths' histories require recognition and valuing. It is important for CYC workers to learn about intergenerational trauma and contemporary policies of Indigenous child relocation that continue to heighten this trauma through the infringement of Indigenous human rights. The CYC field is interested in exploring the role of power in institutional structures and racist ideologies (Garfat et al., 2018). These structures and ideas are at play in the lived experiences of the girls in this study. We echo Garfat et al. (2018) call for CYC practitioners to engage with the context of history and specifically "the histories of residential schools and deeply embedded biases impacting Indigenous communities across North America (p. 11-12). Programs and practices exist that dislocate Indigenous children from their communities and it would be helpful for the CYC field to provide professional development educational opportunities to inform CYC workers of Indigenous child relocation policies and practices and their subsequent impacts on youth (as shared by the girls in this study). Collectively, we are stronger when we work together to directly challenge the political aspects of our work (Scott-Myhre, 2017).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relocation experiences of Indigenous youth in foster care who identify as female. The findings of this study suggest that young girls who are relocated while in foster care experience disruption, difficult transitions, and minimal benefits over time. To take steps towards improving the lives of Indigenous children and youth, there needs to be consideration of the child welfare policies and practices that are impacting them, considering the past, present, and future, and viewing Indigenous children within the context of family and community (Blackstock, 2011). It is taught that children play an important role within Indigenous (including Métis and Nisga'a) worldviews. Children have spirits who come into people's lives because they

have something to teach them. If we try to control or direct them too much, then the children and ourselves do not grow. We both lose something important (Shepherd, personal communication, November 2016). The youth in this story have something to teach us and we encourage readers to be open to these teachings so that we all may grow. Following the lead of our mentor (Archibald, 2008), we enact the reciprocal teaching that one must give their first project away. We offer this research story to you in hopes that you will join us in helping to make transformative change for all Indigenous children in care.

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East Meets West: A Child and Youth Care Perspective about Asian Young People Experiencing Mental Health Challenges

Jaclyn Ng Man Chuen

Abstract

Despite being the fastest growing ethnic group in Canada, the Asian population is found to be the most underrepresented minority group in mental health services, while also having the highest premature drop-out rate of any ethnic group once these services are accessed (Leong & Lau, 2001). Despite the breadth of information that has been uncovered by social science research on the Asian population and mental health, very few studies have explored the experiences of Asian young people when experiencing mental health challenges from a Child and Youth Care perspective. As the experiences of Asian individuals are often overlooked and under-appreciated, this qualitative research study provides six Asian young people with a voice to express their experiences with mental health challenges. From the interviews, key findings were interpreted from social constructivist, critical race theorist, and children's rights lenses, challenging the field in terms of inclusivity when it comes to racialized young people.

Relational Child &Youth Care Practice

Introduction

Although the Asian population is the fastest growing ethnic group in Canada, they continue to be the most underrepresented minority group in mental health services, as well as having significantly higher premature dropout rates for these services than individuals of any other ethnicity (Ausberger, Yeung, Dougher & Hahm, 2015; Gudiño, Lau & Hough, 2008; Tiwari & Wang, 2008). Very few studies have explored the experiences of Asian young people experiencing mental health challenges, and even less have considered this from a Child and Youth Care (CYC) perspective. Although multidisciplinary studies provide knowledge about the challenges that Asian communities face with regards to mental health, they do not take into account the overall experiences of individuals.

Relevancy to Child and Youth Care

CYC literature depicts culture as an interconnection between different cultures in which individuals partake, whereby a person constructs their experiences. (Gharabaghi, 2008; Skott-Myhre, 2012). The different cultures that each person is part of is important to CYC practitioners as it provides a worldview by which both practitioners and clients view, interact with, and experience the world. When practitioners are self-aware of how each of their cultural interactions shapes their worldview, they are better able to understand how racialized young people experience culture (Fulcher, 2001).

Numerous articles also question the validity of cultural competence and ask what it means for CYC practitioners working with young people outside of the dominant culture in whatever context that might be (Gharabaghi, 2008). Practitioners should then focus on cultural humility, which instead stresses the importance of relational practice, synchronicity, and 'walking with' minority youth (Hoskins, 1999). When CYC practitioners come from a place of wonder rather than a place of knowing, they will be better able to comprehend the shifting and complex identities of young people. This shift must take place, as Hoskins (1999) argues that if CYC practitioners and programs do not modify their approaches to work with culturally diverse populations, current theories and practices will become irrelevant for changing populations, thus making the field obsolete.

Hoskins (1999) continues by stating, "As long as we continue to maintain a constraining Eurocentric model for human behaviour, we cannot begin to understand another person's experience, particularly when it is vastly different from your own" (p. 79). This rhetoric is still relevant today, as the field of CYC remains White on all levels. Although multicultural practices are embedded in the field's policies, social hierarchies of racism, imperialism, and colonialism are still present (Skott-Myhre & Little, 2012. This is clearly perpetuated within CYC literature, as only five articles specifically speak about Asian young people and families even though CYC journals have been circulating since 1981.

Child and Youth Care and the Asian Community

Although all of the articles raise awareness about Asian young people and families, none speak to the specific lived experiences of the diverse group. For example, Bromley (1988) and Morrow (1989) both address and recognize the Westernized standards of the field and acknowledges that there is a need for culturally appropriate and responsive supports due to differing norms, customs, and values of Asian young people and families. Gregory (2004) reinforces the notion that Asian voices and experiences are ignored, overlooked, and not yet heard or considered in academic contexts. Similarly, Gudiño *et al*. (2008) verify the disregard of the Asian community, as they generalize the findings of their study, failing to recognize the distinct and complex issues that each ethnic community faces.

Arguably, Moua and Vang (2015) are the only scholars that recognize the distinct issues present for the Asian population, specifically considering Hmong individuals. The scholars found that non-Asian academics - and even non-Asian scholars - who researched and reviewed the experiences of Hmong youth had limited perspectives, ultimately changing the narratives of the Hmong youth experience. This brings to the forefront notions of race and ethnicity in academic settings, and contributes to the conversation about Westernized beliefs, worldviews, and notions that overpower the experiences of racialized communities. The lack of research that provides Asian young people with a voice, along with the staggered time gaps between the five articles about Asian young

people and families is a reflection of how the Asian community's voice is continually marginalized in academic settings.

Method

This research has theoretical underpinnings in social constructivism, critical race theory, and the children's rights framework. Social constructivists seek an understanding of the world, as it focuses on the subjective meanings of individuals' worldviews and emphasizes the importance of culture and context in a person's construction of their knowledge and experiences (Kim, 2001). In addition, critical race theory puts race at the centre of research. It focuses on the construction and reproduction of race and explores the ways in which society and institutions normalize the advantages and disadvantages of different groups of people (Ladson-Billings, 2005). In order to do so, critical race theorists emphasize 'voice of color', which is an individual's personal reality and/or voice in research (Ladson-Billings, 2001). As this research specifically values the importance of youth voice, it will also rely on the children's rights framework. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the rights of children to be heard in a space that enables them to express their views to an audience. Only by providing young people with a voice are individuals then able to take action (Collins, 2016).

In order to conduct this research appropriately, a specific group of individuals were sought out: Asian young people that have struggled with their mental health between the ages of 15 and 24. Individuals were to self-identify as being of East, South and/or Southeast Asian descent, as the term 'Asian Canadian' has been defined to include individuals of these regions (Fehr & Fehr, 2009). Participants were recruited from different agencies that employ CYC practitioners to work in programs specifically geared towards mental health. As each young person encounters their experiences unique to themselves, the primary concern was finding participants who were willing to share their experiences. In total, six young people agreed to partake in the study and engaged in one-hour semi-structured interviews. Common themes emerged within the interviews, which are further analyzed and discussed in the following section.

Key Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of Asian young people who have faced some sort of mental health challenge. It must be noted that due to the small sample size, this research is not representative of the entire Asian community in Toronto. However, this analysis provides useful details that can support CYC professionals in their work.

Acculturation, Immigration History, Identification, and Willingness to Access Services

The migration history and/or generational status of the participants is significant in how they self-identify. This means that the findings align with the notion that immigrants of later generations, as well as those who immigrate before their early teen years, are more likely to accept and hold more Westernized values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns (Fang & Schinke, 2011; Kramer *et al*., 2002). Additionally, literature posits that the more acculturated one is to Western culture, the more likely they are to access mental health services (Abe-Kim *et al*., 2007; Ausberger *et al*., 2015). Thus, it can be assumed that because five of the participants are of later generations and immigrated before their early teen years, they were more likely to have been willing to access mental health services.

Although five of the participants willingly sought out and utilized mental health supports, there is a significant time gap between the average age at which the participants stated that they first experienced poor mental health (13.5 years) and the average age that the participants sought out supports (20.2 years). This astonishing delay speaks to the lack of mental health awareness within the Asian community, since five of the participants identified that they did not know that their mental health challenges were significant due to the lack of conversations about mental health within their family, school and/or community.

This calls for CYC professionals to be more present in the different milieus. Arguably, the education sector would be most significant, as the majority of young people are required to be present in this setting. Despite how the participants self-identified, they waited an average of six years to access services, each of them identifying that they only

accessed these services when it began to affect different areas of their lives. This should encourage CYC practitioners to implement different strategies to reach out to all young people by encouraging them to utilize mental health supports.

Assumptions and Religious Beliefs

Numerous scholarly articles consider Asian individuals as solely following Eastern religions, as the literature reports that traditional Asian belief systems tend to be influenced by Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Nagai, 2008; Nguyen, Shibusawa & Chen, 2012; Tiwari & Wang, 2008). As critical race theory explores the perceptions of racialized individuals and investigates how they are viewed in society and institutions (Ladson-Billings, 2001), this means that the literature itself is perpetuating a belief and stereotype that silences the experiences of the Asian community. As three of the participants grew up in Catholic households, and currently practices Christianity, the findings of this research prove that Asian individuals may practice faiths and beliefs outside of 'Eastern religions', proving that there is a diversity in religious upbringings for young people with which CYC practitioners work. This is significant to the field, as CYC practitioners must be self-aware to ensure that they do not impose their own ideologies and biases about the Asian community on those with which they work. Thus, practitioners should be encouraged to integrate and collaborate with young people and families in order to understand where they are coming from. Practitioners should also respect religious and cultural expectations, especially those concerning mental health and how they deal with issues pertaining to struggles. CYC practitioners must challenge themselves to support their clients by augmenting the treatment expectations and plans for young people to ensure that they are receiving the best possible care.

Stigma, Shame, and the Minimized Experience

All the participants stated that the stigma about mental health that is present in the Asian community (Leong & Lau, 2001; Tiwari & Wang, 2008) has made them feel as though their experiences were minimized, as their families (parents, in particular) did not consider their mental health challenges to be a 'real' issue. This perpetuates the

fundamental belief of the children's rights framework in ensuring that the voices of young people are heard (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). All participants explained that they felt that their experiences were silenced by the taboo nature of mental health, thus leading them to feel shameful of their challenges and/or guilty in their choice to access supports against their parents' wishes.

This is crucial to the participants' experiences, as this alone has made them feel as though they do not matter. Charles and Alexander (2014) explain that CYC practitioners must make young people feel validated in their experiences in order that they feel they have purpose in the world. Thus, practitioners need to collaborate with the families of Asian young people and actively attempt to understand where they are coming from. Through this, practitioners will be able to genuinely create and maintain strong alliances that do not assume that CYC practices are always 'right'. By creating these relationships, CYC practitioners will be able to work with young people and their families to foster stronger bonds between them, setting young people up with successful self-regulation skills once discharged.

The Role of the Family

From a young age, Asian individuals are taught the importance of family and putting family obligations first (Bromley, 1988; Morrow, 1989). The family is highly valued within Asian cultures, so much so that Fang and Schinke (2011) found: "Asian American adolescents who experience high parental conflict are 30 times more likely to engage in suicidal behaviour compared to those with low parental conflict" (p. 287). This demonstrates the influence that the family can have for the decisions that Asian young people make.

From the literature, it can then be anticipated that the family's beliefs about mental health could hinder the participants' willingness to use mental health services. Although this was true for one participant, this was not the case for the other five. One of the participants described her parents as being supportive in her decision to access mental health services. The other four described that they sought out supports despite their parents' wishes, as their mental health was negatively affecting their relationship with

their parents. Thus, in using a social constructivist lens, each of the participants had their own subjective meanings about what their mental health meant for their relationship with their family. Regardless of the role that the family played, it was clearly significant in the participants' decision to seek out mental health supports. There should be a clear focus on family work when CYC practitioners work with Asian young people, thus requiring practitioners to reflect on their own values, beliefs, and biases about the family by considering personal and professional experiences. By doing so, CYC practitioners will be able to work better with families to provide them with opportunities to learn and practice skills together, which ultimately assists in the clients' abilities to cope with their mental health.

Systemic Barriers

Literature discusses systemic barriers as being constricted to culturally irrelevant services, practices, and diagnostic tools, while also including the lack of language and ethnic matches of mental health service providers (i.e., Abe-Kim *et al*., 2007; Fang & Schinke, 2007). This research confirms the literature, as five of the participants acknowledged barriers based on culture and language. The participants also discussed barriers based on other systemic issues that literature did not consider, such as long wait-times and inconvenient locations of Ontario Health Insurance Plan-covered services and expensive fees for private services. Thus, it is clear that multiple barriers influenced the participants' decision to remain, drop out of, and/or access mental health services.

At this point, CYC professionals must ask what can be done for these young people despite the identified barriers. Practitioners can advocate for socially innovative projects to ensure that the location of mental health supports are in sites that are convenient for all young people to access. Additionally, as five participants identified the need for more culturally and linguistically diverse mental health service providers, CYC managers and supervisors should be encouraged to hire more diverse practitioners to work on the frontline and promote more practitioners of colour to positions of higher power in order for young people and families to be able to feel more connected to the field. However, as

this may not be feasible, practitioners should focus on 'walking with' minority youth to effectively work with them (Hoskins, 1999).

Implications

This research challenges the field of CYC to become more inclusive of the diverse needs of different populations of young people. By focusing on the experiences of this particular group, we look away from the experiences of the majority and explore what our practice truly does for minority young people. The findings have also revealed that there is not enough being done to encourage education and promotion of mental health service use for Asian young people. Thus, CYC practitioners must initiate, create, and implement programs in diverse settings, namely that of education, in order to reach all young people. By collaborating with school board administrators and teachers to implement the initiative set by Ontario's Ministry of Education's, *Open Minds, Healthy Minds* (2011), CYC practitioners have the opportunity to reach out to a significant number of young people and families to educate about mental health and promote proactive mental health service use. Finally, the findings illuminate the significance of the family for Asian young people, thus encouraging CYC practitioners to explore different avenues and establish how to work with Asian families in effective and meaningful ways. Practitioners need to authentically integrate and collaborate with the families of young people to combat the stigma of mental health, while also ensuring that the values and cultures of the family are respected. The focus on family work is then intensified, as treatment should then be catered to the unique needs of the young person and their family.

Limitations

Although this research challenges the field in terms of inclusivity, it is not without limitations. The overarching limitation in this study is the use of the term 'Asian' to encompass the minority group. This term does not explain the different ethnicities, cultures, and histories of different Asian ethnicities appropriately. The small sample of participants is a limitation as well. None of the participants are of South Asian descent or under the age of 19, thus having implications for the findings and discussion of this

research. Despite the limitations, this study reveals important elements that will both support future CYC practice, and also inform the need for further research.

Conclusion

The findings of this research show that one's race and cultural upbringing is significant in one's experiences with mental health challenges. It has provided the opportunity to become more aware of what the field of CYC articulates about multicultural practices and the Asian community. Understanding how the literature relates to the participants' experiences has encouraged a more critical perspective in the way one should think about the work that is being done with racialized young people. More importantly, this research has further emphasized the need to focus on the voices of minority young people in research, as it challenges the field of CYC to become more inclusive and authentically diverse. Focusing on the voices and experiences of this particular group of young people will help the field move forward and begin the necessary efforts to become more inclusive and, as Gharabaghi (2017) posits, less White. Although this research is not representative of the experiences of the entire population of Asian young people in Toronto, it does challenge the field to question whether current program and practices are helpful and effective for all young people that are accessing supports.

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A deep dive into the journey of a Muslim CYC practitioner

Zainab Virjee

Abstract

The Child and Youth Care (CYC) field is filled with endless possibilities. Individuals can care for children and youth in a variety of environments, including educational institutions, hospitals, shelters, residential homes, juvenile systems and many more. Throughout the years of practice, individuals can grasp a better understanding of the core characteristics of CYC practice. However, an essential factor within our practice is the understanding of the "Self". Within practice are we, as CYC practitioners, able to do the best we can when caring for children and youth, if we do not truly understand our "Selves"? With endless limitations that CYC practitioners face within organizations and institutions, are individuals honestly themselves when working with children and youth? Though I am a new practitioner in the field, the construction of Self is evolving in every moment of interaction with other individuals. Personally, my Self is affected in my practice living as a Muslim woman in Western society. My social locations establish the ways in which I practice as a CYC practitioner. In this article I will analyze the cultural perspective of a Muslim woman, practicing her faith as well as establishing herself within the CYC care field.

am writing from the perspective of my faith to grasp an understanding of how this creates challenges throughout my journey of becoming a CYC practitioner. The reason

behind my decision to discuss this issue is my wish to explore the presentation of Self while working alongside children and youth, given that my Self is largely affected by my religious beliefs. Our field consists of advocating for children and youth, to ensure they are being active persons in their care plans. Gharabaghi (2008) states, "In practice [...] the construction of boundaries is impacted as much by our identity as practitioners as it is impacted by the organizational culture within which we work and by the policies and procedures imposed by the institution or the employer" (p. 166). This evolving practice continues to face challenges and, at heart, the end goal is to care for the child or youth to the best of our abilities and to ensure their care plans are being adequately met. This cannot happen unless we as practitioners are comfortable with ourselves and our working environments so that we can eliminate as many limitations as possible.The core purpose of CYC practice is to build relationships with individuals, including children, youth, families, team members, and individuals from multi-disciplinary teams. There are many considerations when being in relationship as a CYC with a young person. Decisions can be made in instantaneous moments, but also through a journey of thoughtful processes. Through building relationships, one's identity begins to shine through, which in turn is contributing to one's sense of Self. However, "The exploration of Self does not ask the question 'Who am I?' Instead, it asks the question 'How shall I constitute my Self right now?'" (Gharabaghi, 2008, p. 167). Within every moment, individuals attempt to conform to the situation that is taking place so that they "fit in" to societal constructions of the norm. Individuals may "be" different versions of themselves depending on the environment they are currently in. In the field of CYC, if we are conforming ourselves to benefit the young person, our personal boundaries may be altered because of this.

The children and youth that we work alongside are often vulnerable individuals who are placed within systems and are not actively involved when decisions are made about them. In many instances, practitioners are the voices for the children and youth. Though children and youth have rights, within many institutions they are often not implemented. To be this voice for young people, one's identity and core cultural values and beliefs may be challenged when advocating for young people. If CYC practitioners ignore their values and beliefs within the professional realm, they may well compromise their own self-

identity. Yes, our focus is upon children, youth and families. However, if we are not honest with ourselves, how can we as practitioners build trusting relationships? There are core conceptual frameworks within CYC. Being honest and realistic with young people is the core that enables us to engage with others and build relationships. In addition, the "western view of the individual as an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity [includes one who] (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g., traits, abilities, motives, and values) and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p.225). Within practice, our internal attributes are challenged, possibly causing individuals to question their involvement in this field. There is a sense of curiosity that either pushes people towards engaging in challenging situations or may well discourage individuals from this engagement. Aligning the core values of honesty and realism with the need to remain congruent with internal attributes can indeed be a factor influencing whether the CYC practitioner moves curiously toward or fearfully away from challenging situations and relationships.

Working alongside children and youth can be difficult, especially if one is advocating for a child or youth when this advocacy position does not fit with one's personal values. There may be challenges related to substance use, or supporting youth decisions around abortion. Although remaining true to oneself and being internally congruent is necessary, coming from a place of judgement about a young person for decisions they choose to make, will ultimately hurt the relationship. The challenge then, is how to maintain integrity, regard the young person as their own expert and still do the work required to form genuine relationships when faced with challenging situations. Further, the CYC practitioner is faced with the complexity of working authentically, while finding ways to "manage" one's personal Self. Is not revealing our true Self, beliefs and values unethical or just a part of our job? Surely, if we are not our true selves, there is a potential that we are being untruthful when interacting with young people. We are obligated to be truthful within our practice, but does this include sharing personal views that might well impact or be opposed to those held by the children, youth and families with whom we are in relationship? As an emerging CYC practitioner, I have been told that the institutional policies and procedures must be at the forefront of how we practice. I have been

discouraged from sharing my personal views and value and instructed to keep personal views out of my practice – particularly if it does not youth match organizational values. This conflict can cause many to question if they are bringing value to their work or are valued by their work place.

Perhaps this is why it is so essential that supportive teams are available for debrief within CYC workplaces. It is critical that these teams are diverse to ensure empathetic and respectful understanding during debrief sessions. Though it is part of our job to follow the policies and procedures of our field, our passion and goals within the CYC field is to build "authentic" relationships. Facing and managing conflicting decisions on a daily basis can lead to positive changes in our work, but at the cost of having a negative influence on the Self. Cultural influences are cumulative – built upon throughout the journey of life. In my experience as a Muslim CYC practitioner in a Western setting I believe my CYC practice encourages me to compromise my cultural values. Whether working within a school, hospital or within the youth justice system, individuals whose faith or cultural values may not be represented by the secular norm are asked regularly to compromise their own Self to benefit the youth and often the agencies they support.

With discussions of culture comes consideration of the religious and ethnic contribution of the Self, although this may not be show-cased professionally. My physical experience of wearing a hijab is at the forefront of what many see when they first interact with me. The result is that being a Muslim woman is the first thing that represents my being within the CYC field. My hijab, which is commonly known as a scarf, is a head covering that I choose to wear. Before entering the CYC field, I never found myself being so aware or sensitive when thinking about how my identity influences my interactions. This is also highly influenced by the portrayal of Muslims in the media. My journey as a CYC practitioner as well as the impact of the media's depiction of Muslims, has created barriers to my construction and use of Self within the CYC field.

I became aware of the intersection of my Self, values, relational practice and my CYC role in a moment during my second placement at Oakwood Academy. I became aware that children and youth may notice my "difference" or see me as just another individual. A young boy with autism, who I was working with for about four months turned to me and asked

about my hijab. Such an innocent question, and yet it had a significant impact on my Self and my professional development. I could choose to respond to this question in many ways. I could consider it a threat or challenge, noting the observation of my physical "difference" as negative, based on assumptions and media mistruths; or I could assume this question came from a place of curiosity about who I am – a place of learning without judgement. I realized that with all the children, youth, families, and individuals with whom I work my identity is present. Could it be then, that in moment to-moment interactions, my wearing a hijab creates a barrier to my current practice? Or could it be that this barrier is imposed in my attribution of motive to what could be an innocent curiosity about who I am? These questions are constantly present within my mind when I am working in the field.

Our interactions with young people and their families shape the CYC field. Through moments of challenges and celebration, CYC practitioners are a part of incredible moments. There is a continuous "battle" within oneself of how to present your Self when caring with and for young people. Gharabaghi (2008) explains:

> The exploration of Self takes place within an elastic structure of identity elements that we cannot change but to which we can give meaning based on our own experiences and interpretations. Some of these elements can readily be identified: gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical disability, mental capacity, and so on (p. 170).

As individuals, our journey of Self is evolving, but the clash of differences between personal views and the choices around what is "best" for the young person can create internal moments of doubt. If the intention of the intervention is primary, then our Self may be compromised when working in certain institutional or organizational settings. Self-reflection is critical therefore, not only to the continued evolution of the Self, but also to the continued development of our relationships within practice. If the construction of Self is forever evolving, dependent upon the in-the-moment social interactions we have, even

though this may not be a representation of who you are, being who the child or youth needs you to be in that moment is the outcome. Gharabaghi (2008) explains:

> Child and youth workers are denied their individuality, their uniqueness as individuals, and their role in shaping, fostering or fighting that uniqueness. By allowing for agency, in contrast, child and youth workers become subjects to their thoughts and actions, and each child and youth worker has the privilege and the responsibility of constituting a Self fit for the moment. (p. 167)

As a practitioner in the field, I am surrounded by others who influence the Self. Though, the Self is not always "authentic" given that, when supporting children, youth and families, we need to find ways to find comfort and remain congruent when conforming personal values and beliefs in order to ensure that we advocate for the best interests of the young person.

There are no lessons created to teach the emerging CYC practitioner how to be efficient, well-rounded and internally congruent when faced with challenging decisions and situations. There is only the need to be honest while seeking to hold children youth and families as our priority; for this we need to reflect and learn continually from even the smallest most innocent moments of interactions.

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Information

Publishers

The CYC-Net Press

Editors

Rika Swanzen, PhD

Programme Manager: School of Social Sciences, The Independent Institute of Education.
Chair: Education, Training & Development: South African Council for Social Service Professions.

Jaspreet Bal, PhD, CYCP

Professor, Child and Youth Care, Humber College, Ontario, Canada

Aurrora De Monte, MSc

CYC Faculty, Child and Youth Care Program, Fleming College, Ontario, Canada

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Relational Child & Youth Care Practice welcomes submissions on all aspects relating to young people, families and communities. This includes material that explores the intersectionality of Child and Youth Care practice and the lived experiences of all who are engaged in Child and Youth Care practice. Considerations will also be given to interpersonal dynamics of professional practice and all submissions that assume a relational perspective. This might include topics such as cultural values, ethics, social policy, program design, supervision, education, training etc. Welcomed are also submissions that address advocacy, social justice and reconciliation practices within the diverse spaces and places of Child and Youth Care. Each issue may include refereed articles that comply with acceptable 'academic' standards; submissions contributed by regular and guest columnists; short pieces that describe particular relational experiences and reflections; poetry; artwork and photographs.

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