



Relational
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Good Traditions

Aurora De Monte and Graham McPheat

A tradition can be described as a behaviour which is passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance. Back in 2019 (Volume 32 Issue 3) we published what we hoped was the starting point for the establishment of a new and important tradition within the Child and Youth Care (CYC) community, the sharing of CYC student research projects. In 2019, guest editor Kiaras Gharabaghi introduced our first graduate issue stating that we had three aims – to provide a platform for students to showcase their work, to demonstrate that research, theory and intellectual engagement are now part and parcel of the full spectrum of activity that unfolds in Child and Youth Care, and to begin to bridge educational settings and bring together what we have previously done alone.

Two years on we find ourselves able to embed that tradition further by publishing our second graduate issue, with the intention that this now becomes a regular part of the Relational Child and Youth Care Practice cycle. Our aims for this issue and those that will follow remain consistent with what we set out to begin in 2019. As such, this issue is dedicated to highlighting graduate research from Child and Youth Care practitioners. Their work contributes to the development and transformation of our field and within our communities.

As educators we are excited to bring you this issue. Our daily lives are filled with the opportunity to work alongside emerging practitioners, supporting their knowledge and skill development. We have the privilege to see how much they contribute to the field in their passion and perspective. However, the audience for much of this exciting and vital work can often be limited to the student themselves, their supervisor and any other academic markers. The tradition of a regular issue which will showcase, share and celebrate the range and diversity of research being undertaken across a range of institutions can only benefit our development as a practice.

This issue draws on and presents work from students from programmes at University of Strathclyde, Concordia University, Ryerson University and University of Victoria. Pulling together an issue such as this can take more coordination and input than some others so we would like to thank the faculty and advisors who supported this endeavour and of course, the students/practitioners who are doing this important research and work in their communities and places of practice.

The range of topics and projects presented in this issue gives us cause to be hopeful and excited about the future direction of our practice. They are wide and varied, exploring different dimensions of Child and Youth Care practice, and all have in common the desire to advance our thinking in order that we provide children, youth and families the best care and support that is possible.

The concepts of touch and love are contested topics in our field. Tamara Medford-Williams, Natasha Oliveira Zepeda, Valentina Solkin and Ashley Strange unpack the topic of touch further in their research, urging us all to consider the ethical obligations of touch within therapeutic practice. Kelly Cassano's research turns attention towards exploring how love and care are defined and practiced by practitioners working within the shelter system in Ontario, Canada. Both these pieces of research assist us in charting the murky waters of these overlapping topics for ourselves and in practice.

Research assists us to critically analyze practices and ideologies to address inequities in education and practice settings. Turning our attention towards education, Hawa Barrie draws from various theoretical foundations to promote the need for culturally appropriate frameworks to work with Black youth in Canadian education systems.

Emily Eirikson contributes to the dialogue highlighting the alignment of Child and Youth Care in working alongside disabled people. Eirikson's research opens up the topic of inclusion challenging practitioners to consider how we can move beyond inclusion to promoting belonging.

Denis Lim explores concepts of childhood and citizenship, focusing on how young people are using cyberspace to engage socially and politically. Lim's research critically analyzes perceptions of young people and their activism, illustrating a need to shift our thinking and strategies to support young person empowerment and agency.

Placing children and youth in alternative family-based care has long been a part of the practice landscape. However, it has also often been associated with numerous placement breakdowns and all the trauma and disconnect that this involves. Research from Scotland undertaken by Lisa Angus explores how to create effective matching processes which can create stability within placements and potentially avoid placement breakdowns.

The research of Caroline Moore explores the importance of personal safety for new youth care employees. We know that the first year in a new role can be demanding and can involve the new worker in ensuring their own personal safety in demanding situations. This research explored the concept of personal safety with the aim of enhancing supervisory support within their first year of practice.

Jessica Pratezina presents her research exploring father's involvement as a critical factor in gender equality. In her article, Jessica explores how increased father involvement in the home is not promoted as a factor in gender equality. Even within Child and Youth Care the unequal distribution of care is most often construed as an individual relationship issue instead of a complex social problem and Jessica argues that practitioners are required to interrogate their own practice in this regard.

The research of Wolfgang Vachon focuses on the voices of practitioners who have child welfare, child protection, residential placement, or related experiences and now work in child and youth care. His article presents material from his doctoral research project, exploring their experiences as students and practitioners via an arts-based

approach, specifically a method called audio drama inquiry. It's both unique and challenging.

Taken together, these articles and the varying research projects they represent, showcase not just the work of these individual students but the range of exciting, innovative and important work being carried out across the institutions featured in this issue. Sharing and disseminating it is an important tradition to establish. A Graduate Issue is one important way of achieving this. To be continued ...

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A Reflection on Physical Touch within the Field of Child and Youth Care

*Tamara Medford-Williams, Natasha Oliveira Zepeda, Valentina Solkin
and Ashley Strange*

Abstract

In this paper, the authors provide insight regarding the parameters of touch within the field of Child and Youth Care. This paper highlights the implications of touch on professional and therapeutic relationships and identifies the complexities young people, child and youth care practitioners and/or agencies may face within these settings. The authors' findings further reflect the ramifications touch, or the lack thereof, can have on the client/practitioner relationship, and calls for a thorough understanding of the professional, legal, and developmental responsibilities practitioners hold. These findings are imperative as they underline the ethical obligations and standards of which child and youth care practitioners must adhere to, while calling attention to both the detrimental impact of improper touch, and the value that appropriate forms of touch can have on client development.

Key Words

child and youth care; physical touch; youth; therapeutic; relationships; boundaries; development; ethics.

In utero, the skin is the first organ to develop (Field, 2010). Physical touch has been described as being “the foundation of human experience” (Malette et al., 2018, p. 214). Touch, especially when we are young has been found to be an essential element of human development (Calmes et al., 2013). Throughout history many cultures have demonstrated an association between touch and healing (Calmes et al., 2013). Touch has been used in therapeutic contexts and has been shown to be an effective tool for practitioners (Calmes et al., 2013; Field, 2010). As child and youth care practitioners, there are aspects of physical touch that we need to be mindful of and make decisions around in our work. First, the practices, boundaries, and social norms regarding touch differ across cultures and individuals (Calmes et al., 2013). Ethically, it is important for us to reflect on how the intersections of our identity and/or social location may impact our judgement around engaging in touch in our work, especially because we are in an inherent position of power as child and youth care (CYC) practitioners. With this power comes responsibility; in certain contexts, physical touch can lead to exploitation (Malette et al., 2018). Learning about young people’s boundaries, norms, and cultures regarding touch is crucial. In this paper we will explore the ethics of touch within the context of youth work practice.

Definitions & Parameters of Touch

In a brief overview of the literature engaged with touch, we came across varying definitions and standpoints – literal, legal, philosophical, and cultural, to name a few. In a literal sense, touch is described as two parts (either from a body or object) that lightly or gently come into contact with each other or create pressure against (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021; Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). In a phenomenological framework, however, touch and contact are not as easily defined, as bodily experiences, bodily awareness, tactile responses, and perceptions of pressure and tension are contextual (Aristotle, 1961; De Vignemont & Massin, 2013, pp. 4-6). Socio-cultural and religious interpretations, developmental socialization, legal frameworks, moral and ethical values, and receptions to touch and contact further complexify their characterizations (Bales et al., 2018; Jewitt et al., 2020; Lee Masson et al., 2018; Narvaez et al., 2019; Suvilehto et

al., 2019). Furthermore, and important for care practitioners to be cognizant of, are the parameters on what constitute as appropriate or inappropriate forms of touch with emphasis on consent, law, and influence as agents with authority.

So, while a discussion of sexual touch is beyond the scope of this article, any discussion of touch needs to acknowledge sexual contact as a form of touch. Under Canadian law, sexual contact is described as a form of touch that involves the “deliberate touching of a person’s intimate body parts... or force to cause self-touching by another person of intimate body parts” (Law Insider, 2021), where the age of consent is 18 or older when there is a dynamic of trust or authority over the person in question (Department of Justice Canada, 2017). Practitioners such as counsellors, therapists, doctors, psychologists and other care workers usually have standards of practice (either from an order they belong to or by an organization they work for) that may prohibit such relationships and behaviour even after the therapeutic relationship has ended (Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick, 2017; Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2015). However, although one may have clearly defined parameters of what is regarded as sexual contact or an intimate body part, these can and are negotiated and dependent on culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and situation/context

The above considerations are important for care practitioners to be mindful of as, even if not intended, touch may be construed as sexual contact “if there is even a hint of sexual content to the action in question” (Davidson, 2016). This is what has caused much debate and anxiety surrounding the topics of therapeutic touch as we can find ourselves in ambiguous situations. Boundaries are heavily contextual, and intentions are very difficult to construe outside of the black and white parameters of appropriate touch. As an example, take a situation where there is a young mother who has been diagnosed with post-partum depression and risks losing her baby to the state if she cannot provide sufficient connection with the baby. The mother is then assigned with a female worker who begins a therapeutic dynamic between mother, baby, and worker. Part of this assistance could include changing the baby’s diaper and wiping the baby’s bottom, demonstrating different techniques for holding a baby, techniques for breastfeeding and

Information

Relational Child and Youth Care Practice (formerly *The Journal of Child & Youth Care*, established 1982) is committed to promoting and supporting the profession of Child and Youth Care through disseminating the knowledge and experience of individuals involved in the day-to-day lives of young people.

This commitment is founded upon the belief that all human issues, including personal growth and development, are essentially “relational”.

Certain pieces in *RCYCP* have received peer review. However, we do not peer review all articles as we choose not to exclude those voices where peer review would be inappropriate or on request from writers.

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Relational Child and Youth Care Practice is committed to providing equitable and inclusive spaces that promote and support the global profession of Child and Youth Care through disseminating the knowledge and experience of individuals involved in the day-to-day lives of young people, families and communities. This commitment is founded upon the belief that all human issues, are essentially “relational”.

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.

Material should be submitted by email to rcycp@press.cyc-net.org in standard word processing format (eg. .doc, .rtf). Formal articles should not exceed 6000 words in length (excluding references). Referencing should conform to either APA or Harvard format. Author-date citations should be used within the text and a double-spaced reference section should accompany each article. In all submissions, authorship details including an abstract of no more than 150 words should be included, as well as a short list of keywords at the beginning of the article, a headshot photo and a short author bio of about 100 words to publish with your article. Importantly, authors should also indicate whether a peer review is required (in addition to the standard editorial review).

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