

ROUNDTABLE:
CONVERSATIONS ON CONVERSING IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE

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In the spring of 2011, we had the pleasure of participating in the third Child and Youth Care (CYC) in Action Conference hosted by the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. We were invited by conference chairs Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Jennifer White to participate in a roundtable discussion on the theme of “Conversations on Conversing in Child and Youth Care”. This theme was inspired in part by a recent posting to the CYC-Net listserv, which asked, “Why are people speaking about the field in ways I don’t understand?” Veronica and Jennifer sensed that this question – and the spirited, and at times fractious, discussion that it generated on the listserv – would provide an excellent platform for mutual learning, critique, and reflection. Thus they capitalized on the opportunity to extend a conversation that was already underway, and used the question as a departure point for our roundtable discussion. In this paper, four of us who participated in the roundtable continue this conversation, with each of us probing deeper and pushing further along the themes and ideas we discussed in Victoria. We are not so much responding to any particular questions here, but rather trying to articulate some of our critical reflections on the field as we each are experiencing it. We hope that readers might engage with some of ideas we present in this conversation on their own terms.

In keeping with the spirit of the roundtable discussion, this is a fluid, open-ended, ongoing conversation without end. In working together, we have sought to foster the conditions for open, creative, respectful, and generative conversations across our differences. In other words, we were neither looking to find answers to these questions nor were we seeking to solve problems. On the contrary, our goal was to open up space for fresh ways of thinking about our work. We also want to extend our gratitude to Jennifer and Veronica for initiating and facilitating this conversation.

Initial Reflections on the Roundtable Conversation

Sandrina de Finney

I have been asked to share the kinds of questions I have about the field of child and youth care (CYC) and the conversations I hope can be disrupted, amplified, or added to our evolving, collective musings about the field. I am putting forward four foci for the purpose of further discussion:

First is the question of who we work with in our diverse field, and what brings these children, youth, families, and communities into “CYC” spaces and interventions. I am deeply alarmed that Aboriginal (or, as I prefer, Indigenous¹) children, youth, and families are drastically overrepresented across practically every context in which we practice and research. Whether we are working in the fields of mental health, community and school-based services, residential care, or child protection, First Nations children and youth are the ethno-cultural group that is most represented yet receives the least funding – up to 22% less for social services, and between 25% and 40% less for education (First Nations Education Council, 2009; Trocmé et al., 2006). I am concerned that as a field and as a society, we do not focus enough on how and why

¹ The notion of Aboriginality and who is counted under the already problematic government category of “Aboriginal” warrants unpacking. As an alternative, and to make visible struggles against colonialism among First Peoples around the world, I am opting for the increasingly recognized term “Indigenous”. See de Finney, Dean, Loiselle, and Saraceno (2011) for a more detailed description of ongoing colonialism and Indigeneity.

Indigenous communities are so significantly overrepresented in indicators of social exclusion, yet remain chronically underfunded compared to other Canadians. Too often, this history is treated like a dirty, shameful secret.

The second focus or question that interests me is an examination of what underlies this overrepresentation, a laying bare of the dirty secret of hundreds of years of colonial policies and practices. This secret burns in my throat in whatever work I do. We need to understand colonialism not as something that is “over and done with” but as a powerful contemporary reality; colonial effects are constantly reformulated onto the bodies, spirits, societies, and lands of First Peoples, shaping the lives of children, youth, and families to whom we are committed in our work. But this dynamic remains largely invisible in our discussions of CYC practice, policy, and research – largely absent even in our journals, online networks, conferences, curricula, competencies, even though Fine and Ruglis (2009) argue that the story “is no news to our nation; we were founded on this narrative” (p. 12).

As a third focus, then, in order to make sense of this narrative of colonial racism that is so integral to Canadian society – and by extension, the production of normative constructions of gender, ability, and sexuality, among others – I search for other accounts. Fine and Ruglis (2009) explain that those children, youth, and families who do not meet dominant White standards are treated as “disposable, embodying danger, worthy of dispossession, or in need of containment in order to protect ‘us’” (p. 12). My hope is that alternative stories might disturb the dominant pathologizing discourses of young people and families who fall outside of normative ideas of “adjusted”, “healthy”, “successful”, “beautiful”, “worthy”. I wonder what gets lost when we become stuck in the familiar contours of normative theories and practices? What knowledge and ways of being flow outside the overwhelmingly EuroWestern perspectives that so define our field? What critical theories – specifically, anti and postcolonial, Indigenous, feminist, queer, and other analyses of resistance, hope, transformation – can contribute to this discussion, and to a more productive praxis of social change? How can we make room for unanticipated, nuanced, previously silenced narratives of what counts and what is effective practice? In this search, I am at once attracted to and wary of theoretical fluidity and nomadism. Nomadism and hybridity are fruitful lines out of linear EuroWestern-centric knowledge hierarchies, at the same time as they are colonial strategies of uprootedness, displacement, and dilution.

Lastly, I am interested in reformulating how we think about the relationships among CYC practice, theory, advocacy, and our roles as members of the communities in which we live and work. I am drawn to approaches that do not re-victimize and pathologize all “others”. Eve Tuck (2010), an Indigenous activist and scholar, writes about the limitations of damage-centred perspectives. She stresses that pathology-driven lenses only “seek to document pain, loss, brokenness or damage”, depicting “entire schools, tribes, and communities as flattened, ruined, devastated” (p. 638). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues, a damage-centred approach reduces Indigenous people to “making claims” about their “rights and dues” (p. 143). This approach assumes it is outsiders – specifically, those who represent normative societal values of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism – who have the authority and power to legitimize claims and give up their resources to redress the inequity (a restructuring of power, we know too well, does not happen) while communities themselves are powerless, relegated to “proving” their worth and entitlement. Tuck asks, “What are the consequences of singularly defining schools, communities, and tribes as damaged? Are the long-term costs of these damage narratives worth the benefits?” (p. 638).

Instead of pathologizing frameworks, Tuck proposes a framework of productive possibility, what she calls a framework of smart desire, building on and complicating Deleuze's theorizing of desire. This framework is "intent on convoking loss and oppression, but also wisdom, hope, and *survivance*" (p. 639). According to Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, survivance storytelling constitutes an "active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" and strengthens "the creases of transmotion and sovereignty" (as cited in Tuck, 2010, p. 639).

Tuck's framework has struck a chord with me: What is uncharted, unanticipated, subversive in theory and practice, is in fact precisely what speaks to many of us who do not see our realities represented in the confines of normative EuroWestern-centric perspectives on how lives should be lived. This requires an unpacking and a resisting of the dominant, deeply absorptive discourses of individualization and responsibility for the individual change of our clients – and our personal responsibility not to "burn out" in the face of overwhelming social injustice. Clinical counsellor and community activist Vicky Reynolds (2009) argues that this convenient and deliberate "blame centred" discourse says more about societal problems than about the failures of individual service providers:

The problem is not in our heads or in ourselves, but in the real world where there is a lack of justice. The people I work alongside don't burn me out and they don't hurt me: they transform me, challenge me and inspire me. We're not "burning out", we're resisting being blown up! What is threatening to blow me up is an inability to work in line with my ethics, and my frustrating failure to personally change social contexts of injustice that clients wrestle with and live in. (p. 6)

I think we have a lot to gain from questioning the encumbered, malfunctioning machine of social services. To understand how active coloniality operates is to seriously and humbly interrogate our own complicity/embeddedness in its inner workings – because the system sets us up that way – and in so many ways we are part of the system, and it is part of us. Yet in applied fields such as ours, the concern is frequently voiced that theorization – and particularly critical analyses such as those presented here – detracts from practice and even limits our efforts to connect effectively with children, youth, and families. I find this perspective deeply problematic for several reasons. First, it reproduces a false dichotomy between those who work with and those who think about children, youth, and families, as if working with and thinking about were mutually exclusive acts. Understanding them as such maintains the safety of the status quo and curtails possibilities for radically transformative interventions with children, youth, and families.

From my multiple locations as a community member, academic, practitioner, and activist, I find it necessary to problematize the artificial division between thinking and doing that maintains both EuroWestern privilege and the exclusion of other voices. In the spirit of unsettling such paralyzing dualisms, I emphasize the value of a more collective, politicized approach that integrates collaborative theorization and practice, one that is rooted in working *and* thinking *and* changing *with*. Undoubtedly, my proposal for a collective ethic raises other questions that are beyond the scope of these brief pages, but these are questions I am excited to engage with and that are ripe with possibility. My hope is that our collective engagement can provide an opening for further conversation rather than definitive resolutions.

Cole Little

* What are some of the ongoing conversations in the CYC field today that animate/inspire your work? And why?

The conversations that inspire me the most are with students I teach and youth and families I work with. I teach in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and the majority of my teaching has been with undergraduates. I challenge them on “CYC speak” which tends to leak into conversations without a lot of critical reflection. Although all disciplines involve a particular grooming in conduct, language, and, dare I say, politics, I find the challenge in the classroom the most animating. An inspiring conversation, for me, involves deconstructing the dialect of CYC praxis with a focus on gender, identity, and social justice. A student this year was really challenged by the introduction of postmodern theories of narrative and social constructionism: Do we have a core? Can we really re-author our stories? What gets lost in the process? These philosophical wrestlings in the classroom are what I really thrive on. In my clinical practice, I am inspired most notably by “philosopher teen” who is a young woman well into the territory of recovery from an eating disorder. She asks the raw questions about gender, identity, and social justice that I so often theorize about. Although I see many people in any given week, she is the one that reminds me why I teach, research, and practice. She also reminds me that work in gender issues is not done, alongside the intersections of ability, mental health, identity, racialization, and colonization.

I do find the question – “What are some of the ongoing conversations in the CYC field today that animate/inspire your work? And why?” – somewhat vexing. I draw on various conversations for my work as a teacher, researcher, and practitioner: Ted Talks (www.ted.com), feminist poetry and theory, arts-based methodology, fiction, and talking with people in the grocery line. That said, I believe we as a CYC “field” can draw much animation from the research conversations we are having with specific attention to participatory action research methods and community collaborations that take the traditional idea of “milieu” to a different level of reflection.

* How do you currently make sense of (or engage with) some of the uncertainties and contradictions that are part of our current conversations in CYC?

I truly believe the field of CYC is experiencing an identity crisis of sorts. The emphasis on higher degrees (of which I am a recipient) creates a tension of perceived distance between “the field” and “the academy”. Many of us in the academy are active practitioners, and I think this artificial divide between theory and practice is, at this point, unavoidable, but at all points untenable. There is progressive work around the idea of praxis (White, 2007) but this does not, to me, appear to be embodied and gets taken up as a politically correct lingo of “practice”. I also see the field grappling with EuroWestern paradigms of development alongside its purported strengths-based orientation. While some would argue for a singular CYC discourse, I would invite more conversation around theory and common sense that ground our current perspectives of how dominant and non-dominant discourses merge and counter-merge with the process of helping children, youth, families, and communities.

* What kinds of conversation, if started today, might stimulate new ways of thinking and also reflect the complex conditions in which we all live?

I would invite conversations that are not interested in distilling an essence of CYC but those that focus on the possibility of the field. In my own early training, I was often encouraged to consider “our” difference from other fields and, at times, this felt like professional xenophobia. I believe we need to be asking how we contribute, alongside other helping professionals, to the overall project of social justice. How does one’s work, whether individually, collectively, in a kitchen or an office, contribute to dismantling social norms that actually get in the way of healthy pursuits? How do we, as Schools and a field, acknowledge the research methodologies emerging that support and critique the systems we urge our graduates to join?

Hans Skott-Myhre

* What are some of the ongoing conversations in the CYC field today that animate/inspire your work? And why?

To make sense of this question, it might be worth situating my work and my interests. Throughout my work, I have been operating out of a sense of being an escapee. An escapee, from my perspective, is someone who finds himself or herself surprised to be on the agency side of the equation. It is someone who recognizes that it is quite by accident that they were not caught up in the net of discipline and control that now contains and surrounds the young people they encounter in their work. Somehow, their behaviour and demeanour escaped notice. They slipped the net. Nonetheless, the escapee feels compelled to return to the field of capture over and over again, even though they could very probably safely blend into the broader social milieu without too much of a ripple. What is the purpose of their return? It is to give the keys of the institution to the inmates; to provide avenues of escape and to subvert the dominant power of the guard.

The anti-psychiatrist Franco Basaglia (1987) called such people class traitors in that they refuse to carry out the work of the bourgeoisie. Marx (1978) said that the work of the bourgeoisie or the middle class was to protect the interests of the ruling class from any assault by the working class. Basaglia (1987) said that, in social service or mental health settings such as psychiatric hospitals or residential treatment centres, the interests of the ruling class are vested in what he called the “functionaries of the dominant ideology” (p. 144). What he meant by this was that most staff in such institutions promote and disseminate the belief systems and practices that are to the advantage of the ruling class. In our field, these would be ideas that allow us to justify controlling and disciplining young people, to rationalize dismissing their wisdom, and to valorize our own power and superiority as adults.

As a result, I am interested in several general categories of conversation in our field. One conversation is premised in thinking that challenges any dominant construction of the truth about young people. Another related conversation is any interchange that interrogates common sense notions about the relation between young people and adults. Premised in these conversations is discussion about how our work might be deployed as a practice where we jointly create modes of resistance or liberation for both young people and adults. Finally, I am interested in what the great philosopher David Crosby (1970) called, “letting my freak flag fly”. In short, I am interested in any conversation that emphasizes the importance and value of deviance and difference.

Please note that I am not citing authors, thinkers, and practitioners from our field here, not because they are not having these conversations, but because there are so many that it would not be fair to valorize only the ones of which I am aware. Besides, we all know who the freaks

are, don't we?

* How do you currently make sense of (or engage with) some of the uncertainties and contradictions that are part of our current conversations in CYC?

I am a huge fan of both contradiction and uncertainty, as might well be surmised from my previous comments. I like contradiction because, as Marx (1978) points out, it is through contradiction that we can see the actual machinery of domination. Basaglia (1987) points this out in relation to institutional work with people when he says that it is in the contradiction between the claims of what the institution can do and the reality of what it actually does do, that its real function can be discerned. I think we might well be attentive to this in our own work and in the ways we define our field.

I am fond of uncertainty, because people who are certain ask fewer questions and I think creativity thrives in the rich atmospheric of the unknown that is generated by and generates the question.

How do I engage contradiction? Through seeking the antagonism that arises when the effects of domination become clear to those suffering its effects. This is the rhetorical ground for liberation and revolutionary praxis. I do not seek to smooth over contradiction. I seek it out so as to use it as a tool to build little machines of resistance and escape.

How do I engage uncertainty? I hope to embrace it so that I can stay open to as much of the world and my experience of it as I can. I don't wish to believe in anything as a certainty. I do seek to have faith in contingency and the productivity of all random events.

What does this mean in relation to how I engage our field? I engage our field in primarily two ways:

1. with curiosity and I hope the humility of constantly having conversations with my colleagues that challenge and stimulate me;
2. with a political project designed to constantly undermine the fundamental assumptions of our field and my own beliefs about that field.

* What kinds of conversation, if started today, might stimulate new ways of thinking and also reflect the complex conditions in which we all live?

I believe we have begun the kinds of conversations I have noted above already. I hope we can continue them and I welcome anyone to engage me in conversation critically, creatively, or collegially (or all of the above at the same time). In fact, it would make my day.

Kiaras Gharabaghi

Sometimes it seems that life itself, or at the very least "living life", is so firmly embedded in the imposition of victimization that one is hard pressed to continue searching for alternatives. Of course, the ambiguities of who is being victimized by whom remain, and there are many debates and philosophical discussions pursuant to the disentanglement of such ambiguities. Young people occupy a very special position in the geography of debating these kinds of issues and questions. They are deemed important enough to be considered within the debate, but they

are almost never included in the debate *as young people*. Instead, they are invited to contribute ambiance to the debates by *being young*.

At a time when we are growing increasingly complacent toward the evils of capitalism, colonization, violence, and ideological rhetoric divorced from empirical observation, and when we are, through our cooperation and participation, actively promoting the decay of democracy in order to serve the moment, the range of possible responses on the part of young people to their political marginalization is shrinking rapidly. Conformity and compliance no longer make sense, even if one maintains a strong commitment to hypocrisy and pragmatic disloyalty. We have eroded the value of such cooperation and compliance as an end in itself; no one cooperates because this is good. Cooperation is a means to an end, and en route to the end an act of disloyalty, of abandonment, or of transformation is always required. Young people who cooperate for 18 years with the state, are compliant with the expectations set by the state's agents, and perform as per the state's expectations, are still abandoned based on the state's need to arbitrarily set limits to providing for them. Aboriginal people who cooperated and agreed to compliance regimes through the mechanism of treaties quickly learned about the fickle nature of goodwill. Young First Nations people today pay the price for our acceptance of ideological rhetoric without empirical evidence. An eloquent apology for previous wrongdoing masks the concomitant denial of human rights, material subsistence, and spiritual purity in Aboriginal communities of the North. The echoes of the apology sustain the racism of the present and the future.

So what can be done? And what can be done in the specific context of child and youth care practice and the academic story of this practice? I find myself conveniently categorizing what I see coming from the child and youth care intelligentsia into three groups (thereby grotesquely contributing to the ever-shrinking intellectual depth of thought in our field of practice). The first group of contributions is the ever-expanding scope of evidence-based practice. The foundation of this group of contributions is the quasi-religious belief in doing those things for which we can safely predict the outcomes. I can appreciate how this group of contributions might be of value to a parent emotionally distraught by the self-destructive behaviours of his or her child. This parent needs to know that the interventions selected will produce results that speak to their need for comfort and safety. Stop the self-destructive behaviour is the instruction given, and evidence of likely outcomes is therefore called for. The difficulty with these contributions is that they are divorced from the young person altogether. Evidence-based practice serves the needs not of the young person but of those who have a stake in how the young person turns out. This is inherently oppressive because it reduces the young person to a commodity. But it is not surprising that evidence-based practices have become popular, and even dominant, contributions to the field. Given our deep commitment to consumerism, we do very much like commodities after all.

A second group of contributions takes a completely different approach to staging its credo as a way of thinking about the field. In popular parlance, this group is sometimes referred to as the postmodern perspective, and it is seen to uphold the ideals of anti-oppression, justice, philosophical depth, deconstructive critique, and radical thinking. I am not much of a proponent of popular parlance, largely because it reflects generalizations and poorly articulated simplifications of very complex ideas. I very much like this group of contributions for its focus on those embedded structures and processes in our lives that are often taken for granted and viewed as mere tools rather than as the embodiment of oppression. I very much appreciate the

critique of language itself, for example, which has exposed the cheap and economically brilliant sustaining of the market for professional helpers on the part of those very helpers, who all turn out to have a vested interest in the propagation of the “crazy people myth”. It is this group of contributions, more so than all others, that has resisted ready-made truths about disorders, diagnoses, chemical interventions, and many other things. The challenge for this group, which I experience with each and every engagement of their contributions, is that I find these contributions to be inherently irrelevant to young people. This irrelevance is neither intentional nor problematic. But it is noteworthy for its rhetorical withering as it is transferred to practice. Complex theory withers into common sense practices of non-judgment, the mitigation of oppression and a reflective approach to managing power within relationships and constellations of multiple identities.

I am, at times, inspired by both the evidence-based approach and the critical foundations of the first two groups of contributions. They help to provide frameworks for thinking, for dismantling such thinking and rethinking or thinking again from scratch. In this way, I appreciate both of these groups of contributions very much. I am, however, drawn much more to a third group of contributions that I think provide meaningful critique while also maintaining some acute relevance to young people themselves. These are the contributions that are centred around the imagined experiences of young people and work from these experiences outward to the interveners, the professionals, and the other stakeholders. These are the relationship-focused contributions that seek to understand and develop all kinds of interesting ways of being together. I like these kinds of contributions because I am convinced that for most of us, being together is difficult and replete with unspoken questions and doubts. We are social animals to be sure, but this does not mean we are wise in our social contexts. I do believe that it is the minutia of everyday experiences that require our attention, and that provide opportunities for child and youth care practice and an accompanying rhetoric for such practice, that are open to young people and other stakeholders alike.

What is missing for me is a more explicit focus on resistance and reflective non-compliance. In my experience, virtually everything is better when it must first overcome rejection and then work through ongoing resistance. For young people, a strategically strong approach to responding to all those wishing to be helpful is to reject their help at first, waiting for some adjustments to be made, and then making it very difficult for the helper to be helpful. And just when the outcomes seem good for everyone involved, young people ought to try their hands at disloyalty and abandonment on their terms.

Responses to Initial Reflections from Discussants

Kiaras Gharabaghi

A Response to my Friends and Colleagues:

It is extremely stimulating to read the contributions of my friends and colleagues to this conversation, especially because I have very different personal experiences with each of them. I have to disclose from the start here that I cannot (and also have no desire to) separate my personal experiences with individuals from their written contributions to a professional, academic, fun conversation. For me at least, person and text are organically linked forever, even if neither person nor text stays the same over time. At any rate, it seems to me that all four of us

have some common ideas about things (the word “things” is the only word I can think to capture that about which we have common ideas). We all resist “truth”; we all recognize that there is a political and historical context of injustice, racism, and other deeply disturbing problems that underwrites what we currently face in societies all over the world; and we all dismiss conformity to and compliance with the status quo as a viable or ethical option.

There are some nuanced differences in how we approach things. Sandrina’s focus on the ongoing injustices faced by Indigenous peoples allows for a very powerful critique of Euro-centrism and also opens the doors for exciting reconstructions of knowledge production through storytelling and other methods. I am, of course, very excited about Sandrina’s arguments and believe that this direction is invaluable as a contribution to thinking and being with children and youth. I wonder, however, whether this direction requires a yet more menacing approach to looking at issues of social justice; for decades, voices within the Indigenous communities that are critical of entirely externalizing issues of family violence and child abuse as consequences of colonization and ongoing neo-colonial dynamics have found few opportunities to be heard. In my own context of living through Islam, I have too often seen the difference between critique and dogma dissolved into nothingness, and this is something that we must learn to avoid.

Cole’s comments meet the spirit of my own feelings pretty much head on. Inspiration drawn from students and those we engage with for the purpose of care and self-exploration is tough to beat. I like Cole’s pragmatism and flexibility and I can relate to the multiple conversations she draws on, ranging from virtual worlds of recorded speeches to every conceivable style of narration. I am, perhaps, a little less perturbed by the field’s “identity crisis”; I have always believed that identities in crisis are really the only authentic identities to begin with. I am also not overly concerned about the emergence of an academy within the CYC field, including its valuing of higher degrees. I do, however, disagree strongly with Cole’s (and also Sandrina’s) characterization of the divide between theory and practice as untenable or simply false. I think there is and ought to be such a divide, albeit not one that renders each inaccessible to the other, nor one that requires individuals to commit fully to one at the expense of the other.

I know that both Sandrina and Cole are active as theoreticians and as practitioners (also as advocates and philosophers), and indeed many of the great contributors to theory in social sciences/fields of inquiry assumed both of these roles, including the likes of Foucault, Derrida, and certainly Deleuze and Guattari (1994). But none of them conducted themselves in the same way in their theorizing and their practicing respectively, and I am glad that they did not. I believe that theory should inform practice but not define it; and practice should inspire theory but not contain it. I have to admit that I really dislike reading “applied theory” that reads like a “how to” manual to child and youth care practice; at the same time, I equally dislike reading theoretical work that lays claim to being rooted in practice. Let’s face it, there are individuals in child and youth care who label themselves as practitioners but really are not very good at practice at all; and there are also individuals in our field who label themselves as theoreticians but whose theories are, frankly, ridiculous. There have been many instances of bad practice containing theory: Point and level systems in residential care, control-based approaches in schools, and rationalizations for the criminalization of radical ideas in community-based work are all reflections of this. At the same time, there have been many instances of bad theory inspiring terrible practice: approaches to anti-oppression that silence points of view steeped in different traditions, scientific theory promoting pharmacological interventions, or game theory promoting psychological distortion and confusion.

I don't really understand why anyone would want to eliminate the distinction between theory and practice. Doing so promotes hypocrisy more than anything else we could possibly do. It is when we begin to claim that we are transcending the power differentials between those who get paid to provide services and those who come to receive those services that we take the first step toward becoming little more than a helping industry, with all that this language implies. And it is when we claim to have figured out anti-oppression in practice, or diversity in theory, that our integrity plummets. In reality (my reality), those who do radical theory are doing so within an employment context that could not possibly be more reflective of the hegemony of all that they argue against. And those who do practice follow the commands of logistics and bureaucratic requirements regardless of their theoretical orientation.

This is why I quite like Hans's endorsement of contradiction and uncertainty. And I especially like his idea of little machines of resistance and escape. I think this is a good way of maintaining one's sense of humour in relation to the privilege of getting paid to theorize and the emotional burden of trying to make sense in the process.

Hans Skott-Myhre

At the time of this writing, there have been young people in the streets of Britain burning and looting, facing government troops in Bahrain, Israel, Libya, Syria, Egypt, being beaten and jailed while protesting global capitalist economic policies in the United States and Canada, and facing long prison terms for challenging autocratic rule in China. Ironically, the impulses for these actions seem to fall into two categories, a revolutionary hope for a better future that has led to the struggles outside Europe and a sense that the future holds no hope within Europe. The situations in the U.S. and Canada are a mix of both.

I would argue that the question of whether young people have a sense that they have a viable future is deeply rooted in the contested relationship they have with their elders. In the global economic system heavily promoted and defended by the elders of the ruling class, premised on narcissism, addiction, and greed, the future becomes only a slogan without substance. Under such a system, I would argue that the relation of young people to adults is a global version of the parental addict. The material needs of the children will always come second to the craving for money, power, and profit. Even in the situations where young people are fighting with hope for "democracy", there are multinational corporations salivating at the prospect of a new "open market".

What does this have to do with what my colleagues have written here? Simply everything. When I read their analyses and proposals for working with young people, I sense an antidote to the addiction of global capital: the possibility of a road to sobriety and sanity. Let me be clear in saying that I don't mean to imply a clear path to Utopia; simply a set of relations premised in a struggle for mutual well-being rather than the struggle over who can make the most money while the rest of the world sinks into misery and deprivation.

One of the dynamics of an addictive system is the critical role of denial. Sandra offers an antidote to this in her call for an acknowledgement of what she calls the "dirty shameful secret" of colonialism and its effects. Sandra breaks the code of denial in asking why our field has remained both silent and complicit in the ongoing oppression and cultural violation of Aboriginal young people. She states that it is specifically the ongoing colonial practices that are at the heart of what shapes our relations with young people. Certainly, if we look at all of the conflicts I have noted at the beginning of this reflection, they are all rooted in effects of the

colonial project and its postcolonial hangover. Without a doubt colonial practices are the gateway drug to global capitalism.

The idea that we, as child and youth care workers, can somehow operate in a realm of pure relationship absent an active struggle to overcome the practices imbedded in our common history of colonization is an act of massive and destructive denial. Sandrina tells us that a knowledge of one's history is crucial, that to deny the ongoing effects of historical subjugation and domination is both dangerous and damaging. I would concur and go further to assert that there can be no field of relational child and youth care without undoing the regimes of privilege and power rooted in the practices and beliefs of whiteness.

So where is the antidote? The antidote to the addiction of global capitalism that I find in her writing is precisely in the refusal to deny the actuality of our history and its effects. The avenues she proposes for this I find deeply compelling. The profound need for counter-narratives premised in the material realities of young people and adults are desperately required if we are to discover counter-practices. Her proposal that we investigate Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) notion of desire – that is, the search for a form of desire that is not premised in the hunger of addiction for what we lack – is crucial. Deleuze suggests that if we are to have a desire for the future, it needs to be a desire to act and to become. Such a desire, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) tell us, is premised in reclaiming ourselves as a becoming people. This is what I hear in Sandrina's call for a collectivity of political action.

In my reading of Kiaras's remarks, I also find harbingers of an antidote. If we are to break the wall of denial that is the linchpin of addiction, there is no more powerful suggestion than his statement that conformity and compliance no longer make sense. Young people clearly have exactly this message and are acting it out across the face of global capitalism. The question becomes, how shall we join them?

This is a question of relationship and Kiaras wisely turns us precisely to relationship as the central element of all political and social revolutionary action. Of course, what suffers the most in any addictive system are relationships. It is simply not possible to sustain a caring, nurturing, and trusting relation with an addict. The relationship to the substance of choice (e.g., money and power) will always come first. I would argue that if we are to practice relational child and youth care, then we must be sure that we are not addicts ourselves, that we are not invested in creating our young people as conforming and compliant addicts to serve our own need for denial.

Of course, this is not an easy or clean task. It is a messy struggle under a system that permeates every aspect of our lives. However, one element of the antidote might lie in Kiaras's suggestion that we find interesting ways to be together. Addictive relationships might be dramatic and even traumatic, but they are sadly predictable and not very interesting. To seek interesting ways to be together is to challenge the logic of addiction through an active exploration of the possibilities of jointly creative relations.

Both Kiaras and Cole direct our attention to the central importance of the day-to-day mundane interactions of living in common. It is, of course, in the day-to-day that all actual politics and power relations are formed. While things may play out on the global stage, the staging area for all struggle lies in the mundane. If we are to find an alternative to addictive capitalism, it will be found in the mutuality of what Cole calls the open field of learning. Indeed,

it is in her suggestion that we learn from each other, in the minutia of daily interaction, that we might find the becoming people of a new world.

Cole calls for the dissembling of norms through day-to-day interactions. If we are to challenge the practices of colonialism and refuse compliance and conformity, then we must pay close attention to the micro-politics of every interchange and interaction. Relationships are not conceptual, though they may lead to concepts. These concepts may in turn offer new sets of relationships that produce concepts and so on. Fundamentally, however, relationships are sets of practices. Out of these practices we construct a world together. There is no more revolutionary act than this.

Cole Little

Collective musings about the field

Bodies, spirits, societies/
constellations of multiple identities
(We) rationalize dismissing their wisdom.
They are invited to contribute ambiance
(Not as)
little machines of resistance and escape.
This secret burns in my throat,
conformity and compliance no longer make sense
(but endure)
A particular grooming.
We are part of the system and it is part of us.

Through contradiction, we can see the actual machinery of domination
(Colonialism, heteronormativity, social services, you, me, us).
The echoes of the apology sustain the racism of the present.
The encumbered malfunctioning machine
(defies)
reflective non-compliance,
making it difficult for the helper to be helpful

Being together is difficult –
more active praxis of social change
(pretty please)

I am struck at how four CYC identified/affiliated practitioners appear to be sketching a topography of CYC, but it appears our mediums of choice differ slightly. Perhaps this hints at Kiaras's notion of a Child and Youth Care Intelligentsia! As the found poem above suggests, if our words are woven together, an overall picture emerges that suggests common concerns and articulations of omissions in the field. At the same time, there are points made in the original comments that trouble me. I intend to briefly take up both the resonance and dissonance in this response.

Perhaps most striking are the missing conversations noted by my three colleagues – those of youth. As Sandrina eloquently reflects, Indigenous youth, families, and communities have been systemically denied a voice through systems of colonization that continue to this day. When students rail “but it wasn't me!” they are part of this silencing that leaks into practice. The “dirty little secret” Sandrina refers to is echoed by Kiaras who rightly reflects on a lack of commitment to human rights under the liberal notion of apology. It is not just marginalized youth that are questioned throughout; however, the very notion of youth representation and presence is brought forward. How do we theorize and practice in the absence of youth? Well, as my colleagues point out, it happens out of the commodification of youth and the avoidance of pain. Youth voices are not convenient for the status quo. Hans suggests that “we jointly create modes of resistance or liberation for both young people and adults” and I wholeheartedly concur. Yet my question of this is how this can occur in a CYC context where theory and practice are so easily divisible in conversations.

This brings us back to the “intelligentsia”. I found Kiaras's categories interesting in terms of how one might align with the propagation of CYC thought, and most certainly agree with the problematic underbelly of “evidence-based”. If I could sum up his categories, those would be evidence-based, postmodernist, and organic. While he suggests these overlap, I feel there is again an assumption of what “real” child and youth care practice looks like (organic, obviously). While I concur that the “minutia” of everyday interactions is key to my clinical practice, the analysis of such cannot be amputated from postmodernist assumptions asking me what is taken for granted in that minutia. Kiaras is seemingly, and respectfully so, concerned with the accessibility of the rhetoric we use on youth. Yet, as I have stated before, conversations around power, privilege, justice, diagnosis, and other postmodern “concerns” do not wither in translation with the youth I encounter.

Around their diagnosis of an eating disorder, they tell me about class struggles in their school, about trying to enact environmentalist interventions, the ethics of being a vegetarian, the confines of gender binaries, and the pressures of capitalism. They actively resist the labels on their files; many protest the “crazy people myth”. Perhaps where Kiaras and I converge is the need for “a more explicit focus on resistance and reflective non-compliance”. And this then becomes the connection between practice and theory. I applaud Sandrina's call for a “more collective, politicized approach to praxis that integrates collaborative theorization and practice, one that is rooted in working and thinking with”. For me, this would involve a serious consideration to how we theorize, research, and teach child and youth care – because it is the students who take those ideas into practice, develop policy, and so on. An example of this would be recent curriculum I am writing. The question at hand is what theories to include in a core helping course. I struggle to create a theoretical literacy without a systemic grooming of individual foci of change – it's damned hard. So, on a very practical (and political level) of

curriculum writing, I struggle to maintain my idealism of human change processes along conscripted lines of what students “need” to know.

Sandrina de Finney

I am especially inspired by Hans’s and Cole’s discussion of everyday micro disruptions, and by Kiaras’s proposal for coming together differently. I am interested in thinking about politics of change and the intimacy of entanglement in community from both the inside out and the outside in, and everywhere in between. How and why, I wonder, can we engage differently, together? In this vein, I want to heed Hans’s and Cole’s wise warnings about becoming overly invested in micro engagements without linkages to the *why*. Cole insists that the minutia of the everyday cannot be dismembered from an examination of power and privilege. Hans’s assertion is that operating in the realm of pure relationship without an active struggle to overcome our history of colonization is an act of massive and destructive denial. Achieving deep engagement with each other while maintaining an equally deep analysis of what shapes these encounters is, I think, at the heart of what we are struggling with here – how to do both at once, while remaining productively open. Being together differently only happens if we link that project to an understanding of what we hope to *do* differently. This is why I think the organic relation between theory and practice is so important; for me, “doing differently” is about understanding why things are not working as they are. It is to this tension that I want to speak here, again not in the hopes of producing definitive answers, but to raise questions I have been struggling with for a long time as a CYC worker, researcher, and community member.

If we are indeed to find something new in the mundane moments of interaction with each other – an idea I find promising – we need to understand why some voices are missing from our daily engagements and why the playing field – even in those mundane moments – is already inequitable, warped, politicized. There is a link here that is vital if we are to see the full picture. This is why I am so determined to talk about the dirty secret of Canada’s becoming – how Indigenous Peoples became fourth-world citizens in their own lands in the span of a few hundred years – and about why it is such a big deal to even bring up this issue in our field. If you will not take my word for it, perhaps you will find that Canada’s very own Auditor General has a more authoritative take on the issue. Before she retired recently, Auditor General Sheila Fraser released an evaluation of 10 years of federal policies dealing with First Nations². Her report states that the basics of life – education, child welfare, clean drinking water, and adequate housing – are persistently and dramatically substandard for First Nations, and in some cases the situation is deteriorating. In speaking to these findings, Fraser noted: “I am profoundly disappointed to note ... [that] a disproportionate number of First Nations people still lack the most basic services that other Canadians take for granted” and that “in a country as rich as Canada, this disparity is unacceptable.” Fraser eschews an “internal explication” and points instead to the impact of “deep-seated inequalities”: “In our view, many of the problems facing First Nations go deeper than the existing programs’ lack of efficiency and effectiveness.”

I appreciate Kiaras’s concerns about getting bogged down in dogma, and how unhelpful that molar positioning becomes when we are asking people to think productively. I do not think paying attention to what the Auditor General calls “deep-seated inequalities” makes this analysis dogmatic or reductionist – a focus on structural inequities is an attempt not to minimize the

² For the full report, see http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201106_04_e_35372.html.

complexity of the situation, but rather to augment it. I am trying to nuance and expand what has so far been an extremely one-sided and narrow account. How else can we explain why thousands of families from completely different First Nations in different parts of the country are experiencing the same patterns of chronic poverty, racial discrimination, and underfunding that even our own government calls “unacceptable”? What is the common thread here?

I think that when we are working with a First Nation youth who was taken into care when a white child in the same circumstances was not, or a First Nation community whose social services are underfunded by 22% compared to the non-Native town down the road, we need to look beyond internal, pathologizing, victim-blaming rationalizations. In my view, the dogma we need to disrupt is that of overly individualized explanations that preclude urgently needed discussions of what is happening in the world. The living footprint of colonialism impacts how we theorize as much as how we practice because it shapes our funding, our legislation, our bodies and spirits, our professional frameworks, what we expect of children and youth, and what they expect of us.

I do strongly feel that we urgently require engagement with the perspectives of other communities – children and youth included – who are ignored under a EuroWestern colonial paradigm that shapes the “canon” of our field. Yet this past year, when a CYC-Net post asked for important CYC texts dealing with diversity, not one response could suggest a uniquely CYC resource. I know this gap in our CYC literature concerns many of us. The theories and practices that inform our field are, in the main, dominated by the work of white European and North American men, with the occasional (and important) exception. We are working within a remarkably narrow and ethnocentric history of child and youth care perspectives. While I have learned a lot from these perspectives, along with many others I am interested in what the other 80% of the world thinks about child, youth, family, and community wellness. I am saddened when I hear that this suggestion might generate resistance or defensiveness. I wonder why paying attention to microdynamics makes us ethical and creative, while attending to what links microdynamics – the meta story of colonialism and global capitalism that Hans refers to – makes us dismembered from practice?

And so, how do we think about change and come together differently, more inclusively and subversively? I love that Cole comes right out and says “it’s damned hard”. Indigenous scholars Thomas and Green (2007) stress that social change “should always be complicated and uncomfortable” (p. 91), but within this messiness and contradiction, I see great potential. Like my co-conversationalists, I think finding our way out of this requires radical imagining and hope, and a commitment to work in uncharted waters through the “damned hard” parts of it. I really appreciate Kiaras’s point that our engagement with each other is shaped by our common dismissal of conformity to and compliance with the status quo as a viable or ethical option. In my work with diverse communities, I have always found that a willingness to work in this way is essential to building relationships because it honours the critical knowledge and multiple forms of advocacy and political engagement that communities already hold.

Naming and addressing social injustice challenges us to engage both personally and politically as practitioners and researchers beyond the rhetoric of “practice” versus “theory”. Neither research nor practice can be seen as distinct, mutually exclusive wholes; as many differences and tensions exist *within* practice and *within* theory as *between* theory and practice. I want to practice *and* research in a critical way – while certainly I bring different tools and skills to theory and practice, a critical, non-EuroWestern-centric, decolonizing approach is the thread

that works across both. For me, “coming together differently” requires a multiplication of possibility: Hans talks about little machines – a more mutual, collective, political everyday struggle for productive engagement – to release a different energy, a disruption of static, reductive sedimentations. I think researchers and practitioners who are concerned about neo-colonial dynamics are walking a similar path, with a goal of making our field more critically engaged and responsive to the issues that matter to the diverse communities we work with. Many other teachings, perspectives, and ways of working can enrich our collective exploration. Why not include them in the conversation?

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