



## International Journal of Social Pedagogy

---

### Risking Attachments in Teaching Child and Youth Care in Twenty-First-Century Settler Colonial, Environmental and Biotechnological Worlds

Jennifer White<sup>1,\*</sup>, Scott Kouri<sup>1</sup>, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw<sup>1</sup>

**How to cite:** White, J., Kouri, S., Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. 'Risking Attachments in Teaching Child and Youth Care in Twenty-First-Century Settler Colonial, Environmental and Biotechnological Worlds.' *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 2017, 6 (1), pp.43–63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2017.v6.1.004>

Published: 6 October, 2017

---

#### Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

#### Copyright:

© 2017, The Author(s) • This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2017.v6.1.004>

#### Open Access:

*International Journal of Social Pedagogy* is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

\*Correspondence: [jhwhite@uvic.ca](mailto:jhwhite@uvic.ca)

<sup>1</sup> School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Canada

# Risking Attachments in Teaching Child and Youth Care in Twenty-First-Century Settler Colonial, Environmental and Biotechnological Worlds

*Jennifer White*

*Scott Kouri*

*Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw*

## Abstract

As a way to implicate ourselves in the politics of teaching child and youth care, we write as witnesses of the world and, in so doing, we make risky attachments by exploring a politically engaged child and youth care education that does not promote insurance, control or detachment. Rather, in this paper we critically locate child and youth care education within the political and economic realities of today's world. We grapple with the complexities of educating child and youth care practitioners deeply embedded in neoliberal capitalism and settler colonialism, and explore the conceptual shifts that we are experimenting with in our own teaching practices to engage in human service work that responds with care to individual and family need and suffering by engaging with the very structures that perpetuate harm and violence in our society.

## Keywords

pedagogy; human services; settler colonialism; politics of teaching; twenty-first century

The opportunity to consolidate some of our own thinking about what it means to educate the next generation of child and youth care practitioners is timely and welcome. We write this article from our location as settlers on unceded Coast and Straits Salish territories where our research, teaching and writing is made legitimate by educational, economic and political structures which have systematically worked to remove Indigenous people, culture and knowledge from this land.<sup>1</sup> As researchers and teachers in the areas of environmental early childhood studies, clinical counselling and youth suicide prevention, we have a strong and vested interest in offering an intellectually rigorous and transformative praxis for our undergraduate and graduate students. Specifically, we seek to create the conditions for learning that will enable us and our students to engage with the challenges of caring for diverse and differently located and implicated children, youth, families and communities in a complex and increasingly globalised and politicised world.

As a way to implicate ourselves in the politics of teaching child and youth care, we write as witnesses of the world, throwing ourselves open to the dangers of what might emerge given our own institutional entanglements – namely undergraduate programme chair (Veronica), doctoral student (Scott) and director (Jennifer) in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Although we are not speaking for our institution, we recognise that we can never be outside of it. We strongly believe that a politically engaged child and youth care education may be best addressed not with insurance, control or detachment, but through reaching out into the world we inhabit (Haraway, 2008). As colleagues, co-authors, scholars and teachers we acknowledge the citational privilege (Ahmed, 2014), responsibility and attachments we have in shaping pedagogical and practice discourses in child and youth care, which includes making decisions about whose voices are included and whose are excluded. These risky attachments are necessary to create pedagogies that respond to the complex and difficult times we live in, which we have each begun to explore in different ways (see e.g. *Common World Childhoods*, 2015; Kouri, 2015; Kouri & Skott-Myhre, 2015; White, 2015). Perhaps even more importantly, these risky attachments also make possible a child and youth care pedagogy that is life affirming, joyful and open to its own future.

In this article, we explore conceptual and pedagogical possibilities of a politically and socially engaged child and youth care education – an education that responds critically to the many issues that impact the lives of diverse children, youth, families and communities. Here we sketch a

pedagogy responsive to how our colonial past and present shape child and youth care practice. This includes, among other things, consideration of the ecological challenges that twenty-first-century children and youth are inheriting, the move toward biotechnological deployments including ‘cognitive enhancements’, as well as genetic manipulation through human/computer interfaces and pharmaceuticals. These issues – intractably tied to globalised neoliberal capitalism, extreme inequality, energy and food crises, burgeoning prison and arms industries and wars that are displacing and massacring hundreds of thousands of children yearly across the Middle East and North Africa – can no longer be set outside our child and youth care purview. Nor can they be unproblematically relegated to the macrosystem level of an ecological model.<sup>2</sup> Rather, we are critically locating the preparation of practitioners for child and youth care work within the political and economic realities of today’s world. We therefore grapple with the complexities of educating child and youth care practitioners deeply embedded in neoliberal and settler colonial capitalism. We explore the conceptual shifts that we are experimenting with in our own teaching practices to engage in care and human service work that responds to individual and family need and suffering by engaging with the very structures that perpetuate harm and violence in our society. We assume that engaging in child and youth care work (including teaching) is a political act, an act that always has the potential to simultaneously replicate and resist the historical moment. Thus, we begin with a discussion of how child and youth care practice is always, already political.

## **Child and Youth Care as Politicised Praxis**

Building on child and youth care’s strong history of conceptualising and responding to social and historical contexts (Anglin et al., 1990), and supporting Indigenous communities to look after their own children in culturally responsible and respectful ways (Ball & Pence, 2006; de Finney, 2007), we would like to encourage child and youth care practitioners to address the world in which children, youth, families and communities are now emerging. Shifting from a tightly regulated and narrow pedagogical focus, we propose an education that relinquishes the illusion of mastery and control, and instead supports students’ perseverance in the midst of contestation and complexity (Barnett, 2012; Knight, 2001), invites students to analyse and address issues in the world that are relevant to them, and pursues the goals of

decolonisation and social justice (de Finney, 2015; Newbury, 2009; Reynolds, 2014; Simpson, 2014). Specifically, we attempt to collectively create opportunities for our students to practise caring about life and society by *caring with* children, youth, families and communities, recognising this as a thoroughly political endeavour. In other words, we want to articulate and pursue alternative forms of ethical relations and possible future worlds through a responsive pedagogical praxis.

Alternative approaches require that we think otherwise about both the ends and means of child and youth care practice and ask questions that bring into view the socio-political and historical forces that are shaping all of our lives in the twenty-first century. Globalisation, settler colonialism, neoliberalism, growing inequality, consumerism, racial injustice, gender violence, war and environmental degradation are social forces that threaten our individual and collective well-being and require alternative ethical relations, visions and future worlds. We engage with vocabularies and conceptual tools that move us beyond familiar articulations of child and youth care and gesture towards a living praxis with children, youth, families and communities that recognises the explicitly political and ethical nature of child and youth care in a changing world.

Luckily, we are not the first to take on this challenging endeavour. Child and youth care praxis and education has a strong and vibrant tradition of activism and social critique, and in this article we build on and bring forward some of these recent discussions. For example, we build on Little's (2011) feminist pedagogy to think about the intersections of identity, theory and practice. Little challenges the dichotomising of theory and practice, and the identity politics that follow, by creatively inquiring into the university classroom as 'a largely unexamined site of critical child and youth care practice' (p. 6). Little situates quests for authentic child and youth care identities in discourses saturated in power, discrimination and privilege, and elaborates how pedagogical praxis and activism are rendered risky or insufficient child and youth care practice by discourses of authenticity. Little suggests that practices of activism, research and theory are integral to a critical and reflexive child and youth care praxis, and that radical pedagogy is necessary to challenge hegemony and 'reconceptualise the academic context as a rich site of contesting child and youth care norms' (2011, p. 16).

We are also inspired by Skott-Myhre and Skott-Myhre's (2011) scholarship on praxis of love and liberation that theorises how care work can resist being assimilated into capitalism. In describing child

and youth care praxis as political, the authors encourage the use of theories that have the capacity to challenge society's dominant social forces. They specifically take up a Marxist reading of child and youth care to argue that praxis 'requires that we not only theorize and reflect, but that our theories allow us new avenues of action that have the capacity to change the world' (p. 42). They suggest that professionalisation and standards of competence draw on and sustain hierarchy, power and profiteering systems and therefore deprive youth and youth work of their revolutionary political potential. Politicised praxis and pedagogy, conversely, is an active political approach enlivened by the complex relations between youth and adults.

As a way of continuing the work of these scholars, we experiment by thinking child and youth care from some unfamiliar starting places; ones that do not centre the 'vulnerable child' or the 'at risk family' what Tuck (2009) calls a damaged-centred approach which potentially 'reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of ... people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless' (p. 409). Instead of beginning with the damaged child or family, we begin with our current socio-political context in the Global North and seek paths that implicate and transform our teaching praxis. Tuck highlights desire-based frameworks that centre the wisdom and hope of communities within an understanding of the 'complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives' (p. 416) as one such approach. Taking a desire-based framework into child and youth care, we sidestep the problematic dichotomy between damage and resiliency by focusing instead on how children, families and communities – as well as practitioner and pedagogues – simultaneously replicate and resist their constitutive social relations while reassembling elements of those relations in ways that hint at new ways of living life. Skott-Myhre and Skott-Myhre (2015) argue that desire is not about what is missing, but rather about forces of action and productivity that are socially embedded. In other words, these forces are 'the foundation of all forms of human creativity and hence all forms of human sociality' (p. 583). Desire-based frameworks therefore cycle between productive and destructive social forces and new worlds that are always in the making.

Importantly, we are *not* suggesting that our strong child and youth care tradition of cultivating constructive, individualised, loving and caring relationships with children or families in pursuit of educational or therapeutic ends is no longer important or worth sustaining. Rather, we are bringing a broader set of considerations into view so that our understanding of the experiences, challenges and possibilities that

children, youth, families and agencies bring to our attention as child and youth care practitioners will always be informed by a historical, cultural and socio-political analysis. As we argue below, dominant discourses, material realities and socio-political relations are not mere backdrops to our work; rather they are highly *constitutive* of the way that individual and group identities, social relations and possible future worlds are produced. Current social arrangements, normative frameworks and colonial relations of power make certain ways of being persons and existing in the world possible and desirable while excluding and making others more vulnerable. We are interested in how our desires and productivity might be liberated – or be the liberating force – from the harmful and oppressive organisation of society which is neoliberal capitalism and settler colonialism.

Here we find useful Kivel's (2007) distinction between social service work and social change work: '*social service work* addresses the needs of individuals reeling from the personal and devastating impact of intuitional systems of exploitation and violence'; while '*social change work* challenges the root causes of the exploitation and violence' (p. 129, italics in original). Thus, following Kivel, our understanding of a politicised praxis in post-secondary child and youth care education involves analysing the relationship that the field has to social service and social change work, even wondering if the two are incommensurable. For instance, for those of us settlers who occupy Indigenous territory without permission (which often includes the majority of child and youth care practitioners), this might mean that we must seriously consider how we may be unwittingly or unknowingly participating in ongoing colonial practices under the guise of being helpful (Chapman, 2013). We might also take stock of the fact that our livelihoods depend in large part on segments of the population being vulnerable in some way (Saraceno, 2012), and that our work generally mitigates harms, while leaving those systems that produce such harms intact. The recognition of our own complicity in the production of vulnerabilities, disenfranchisement and injustice requires new (more troubled, less exalted<sup>3</sup>) ways of constituting ourselves, and new (more critical, less certain) ways of thinking and doing child and youth care. In the last part of the article, we explore three overlapping conceptual shifts that we believe hold fresh promise for educating child and youth care practitioners in the twenty-first century: cultivating a troubled consciousness, decolonising praxis and crafting new subjectivities for our unsettling times. But first we discuss three interrelated political and social realities of today's world that are relevant to how we conceptualise child and

youth care education: settler colonialism, environmental degradation and biotechnological enhancement.

## Responding to a Complex World

Implicating ourselves in settler colonialism

As we mentioned above, our privilege and power to engage in child and youth care praxis is implicated in the ongoing settler colonisation of the lands, which are now known collectively as Canada (de Finney, 2014). Through European colonialism and imperialism, the lands known to Indigenous peoples for millennia as Turtle Island were violently stolen, and settler colonialism continues to this day through land exploitation, the reserve system and institutional racism. Child and youth care, along with other social services, are complicit in the history and continuity of colonialism through practices such as child removal, centring Euro-Western understandings of development and kinship relations, individualising and privatising social problems, and providing services that simply mitigate or buffer colonialism's effects without any effort to structurally change it. While colonialism has shifted and moved, and continues to shift and move (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005), Eurocentric motives of the colonial project remain powerful, and colonialism still exerts an explicitly violent power that seeks to empty lands for settler occupation and profit (Byrd, 2011; Morgensen, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Indeed, colonialism structures all of society (Byrd, 2011).

As a first example, the education system (Simpson, 2014), including our own higher education context where we teach child and youth care, is a site in which students and educators are enculturated into neoliberal capitalism and settler colonialism. As 'professional' schools subsidised by the state, child and youth care programmes are specifically tasked to help produce 'job-ready graduates'. In other words, through their encounters with the curriculum, our students (and those they work with) are being professionally prepared as labourers for the Canadian economy, consumers for the global market and conforming citizens for our neoliberal democracies. We entice students to comply with this system through promises of jobs, security and opportunities to build a life and home on this land (as well as through fear of not attaining these things). Not only are many of our educational activities tantamount to further land theft, exploitation and environmental racism, we also simultaneously reinforce asymmetrical relations of



power between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge and use the academy as 'a training ground to legitimize settler colonial authority over Indigenous peoples' (Simpson, 2014, p. 22). Settler colonialism continues into the twenty-first century to structure the aims and avenues for much CYC education and practice.

As a second example, child and youth care is complicit in practices of racist child apprehension practices, which continue to disproportionately remove Indigenous children from their homes. De Finney (2014) explains that 'newer waves of residential internment, each worse than the previous one, have targeted Indigenous children' (p. 13) and have contributed to more Indigenous children being in government 'care' today than during the residential school era. According to the First Nations Education Council (as cited in de Finney, 2014) Indigenous children make up more than 50 per cent of the children in foster care while representing less than 4 per cent of Canada's population. Denial of ongoing settler colonialism helps to frame many of our engagements with Indigenous peoples as 'helping' and 'service provision'. An educational approach with the capacity to accurately map and resist 'the tentacles of colonization' (McCaffrey, 2010, p. 343) is desperately required.

### Implicating ourselves in environmental destruction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, child and youth care praxis and education needs to pay careful attention to the biogeological systems changes that we bequeath to future generations. As a direct extension of colonial thought and practice, current irreversible human-induced changes to the earth's interdependent geo and bio systems (often referred as the Anthropocene) calls into question the sustainability of life on earth as we know it, including the survival of our own species (Gibson et al., 2015). At the time of writing, British Columbia is being ravaged by unprecedented heatwaves, wildfire and drought, while at the same time the province is being sued for over \$10 billion by a US firm under a free trade agreement for banning water exports. The negative consequences of extreme weather, flooding and polluted air and water, continue to be differentially distributed in a system of environmental racism and neoliberal privatisation of natural resources.

Consider also the environmental degradation and community dislocation brought by the oil sands development in Alberta, as well as the growing web of pipelines that radiate into and through Indigenous lands with dire consequences. Nikiforuk (2010) explains that all major multinational oil companies now have a stake in the Alberta tar sands

and Canada is quickly sealing its fate as the provider of low-quality energy to the world, with disastrous environmental and political consequences at home. This is the radically altered world of demolished forests, poisoned soil and toxic tailings ponds that we now bequeath to future generations, a topic which rarely enters our professional conversations about or with children. While child and youth care practice and education seem distant from such catastrophes – or even remedial in terms of providing child care services or parenting support to impacted communities – our own dependencies on oil (driving to work, flying to conferences, disposable containers for food and drinks) or our hopes for a growing economy to provide jobs for ourselves, our children and our students are tied to the fate of innumerable people and species nearby and across the globe. This realisation compels us to consider our ethical responsibilities as educators to tackle the pressing interrelated questions of interspecies and intergenerational justice in the Anthropocene.<sup>4</sup> We are not only accountable to our children and future students in our lifestyle choices, we are pedagogically responsible to meet and join with a growing number of young people who are committed to examining and transforming current systems, practices and relations.

These ethical responsibilities may seem distant to our accountabilities as instructors. Yet, how we ‘educate’ child and youth care (CYC) practitioners is closely linked to the environmental destruction that we are witnessing in the twenty-first century. Most child and youth care literature is framed by mid-twentieth-century human development theories and humanist therapeutic approaches, remaining committed to individually focused, child/youth-centred practice. We can no longer deny that we (humans) have fundamentally altered the planet that sustains us by our short-sighted and human-centric actions, and can no longer deny that human and natural histories and futures are inextricably entwined (Chakrabarty, 2009; Gibson et al., 2015). Thus, inspired by environmental humanities and Indigenous scholars, we believe that child and youth care education needs to engage with contemporary literature that radically shifts what it means to be human (Gibson et al., 2015). More specifically, we seek to resituate the human within the environment and the environment within the ethical domain (Gibson et al., 2015), to recognise that our lives and fates are co-implicated with those of all other species (Haraway, 2011, 2013; Hird, 2012, 2013; Rose, 2011). How might we rethink what it means to be human in the Anthropocene, resituate children/youth within common world environments (Latour, 2004) and focus on all of our environmental and more-than-human relations?

## Implicating ourselves in biotechnological deployments

We also propose that child and youth care needs to critically engage with the ethical implications of biotechnological deployments in neoliberal times. We refer to the rise in the use of cognitive enhancements (including neurotechnologies and medications) for advancing children's psychological, cognitive and behavioural functioning – specifically, to methods for improving the functioning and life prospects of individuals who are *not* ill (Hagger & Hagger Johnson, 2011). For example, in North America, there is evidence to suggest that some parents are pursuing a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) so their children can be prescribed Ritalin, which has been shown to improve concentration among individuals who *do not* have a diagnosed condition of ADHD (Hagger & Hagger Johnson, 2011). The popularity of such enhancements (which are distinguished from treatment) can only be understood in the context of a highly competitive culture, where winning at any cost is a cultural norm. In other words, 'attempts to improve upon species-typical parameters' (Hagger & Hagger Johnson, 2011, p. 141), which raises the dark spectre of eugenics, are largely unremarkable in a cultural context where individual rights, human betterment and the freedom to pursue self-interest and self-defined goals are highly prized (Gaucher et al., 2013).

As child and youth care instructors and practitioners thinking through Foucault's (1978) analyses of power relations, we are wary of these movements and our own implication in them. We wonder how valued knowledges and skills in child and youth care education – for instance, 'knowing about' children through theories of human development, intervening in the life space of a family or understanding one's self as an internal set of values, characteristics and desires – have become ways in which neoliberalism and colonialism have infiltrated our everyday lives, reproducing the very problems that we are here attempting to map and provide alternatives for. In the final part of this article we explicate three pedagogical themes that have provided us with hope in reconstituting CYC as a socially just and politicised praxis.

## Practising in the Midst of Complexities and Destructions

What kinds of conceptual tools might help students and instructors navigate such troublesome tensions and contradictions?

## Cultivating a troubled consciousness

The first conceptual possibility that we find useful for a politically and socially engaged child and youth care education involves exploring the pedagogical potential of cultivating a form of ‘troubled consciousness’ (Chapman, 2013). Instead of preparing child and youth care practitioners to acquire settled and secure knowledge about children, youth and families, we are interested in conceptualising CYC education and practice as more of an ethical journey than an end state. Cultivating a troubled consciousness involves supporting the emergence of a less certain, more precarious, more ethically and politically minded way of being. This is in contrast to pedagogical approaches that valorise mastery of fixed knowledge, demonstration of measurable competencies and adherence to codes of conduct – what Chapman calls ‘compulsory-sound mindedness’ (p. 182). According to Chapman, a troubled consciousness is ‘the political and ethical practice of journeying with internalized accountability narratives and the resultant feelings, uncertainties, and destabilizations of a straightforwardly moral self. These experiences do – and should – accompany implicating oneself in oppression’ (p. 183).

Cultivating a troubled consciousness among post-secondary students is a major challenge in a professional, political and educational context where the exalted ‘straightforwardly moral self’ and the unencumbered, competent, knowing professional are the unspoken heroic figures at the centre of our professional discourses, pedagogies and practice frameworks. Descriptions of the field, codes of ethics, accreditation requirements, professional competencies, course syllabi, learning outcomes and assessment techniques are all typically organised around a view of the competent reflective, self-aware, strengths-based, collaborative, relational and holistic child and youth care practitioner: a constructed professional identity that some of us have had an active hand in shaping and amplifying (White, 2007). While there is often an explicit commitment to promoting ‘diversity’ or ‘social justice’ in many recent descriptions of child and youth care, at times, it seems as though these commitments can become de-politicised and serve as ‘happy substitutes’ for avoiding talking about racism and the occupation of Indigenous lands (Ahmed, 2012). We are interested in exploring how we might extend and deepen some of our professional values and ethical commitments in child and youth care in ways that are less self-congratulatory, and more like critical interrogations and creative disruptions in pursuit of precarious, tenuous and politically minded practices.

We take several practical steps in the classroom to support child and youth care students to recognise that structural forces (e.g. white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalist greed, colonial relations of power) not only negatively impact the lives of children, youth and families, but they also shape our own practices. When we begin with the recognition that there is no such thing as trouble-free, neutral or innocent knowledge, the onus is then on us to spend considerable time preparing a learning space that can hold contradictions, incommensurability and room for the not yet known. More specifically, as instructors, we attempt to create the conditions that will enable the expression of contradictory emotions, including stress, anxiety, guilt, anger, defensiveness and sadness (Ahmed, 2014) that inevitably accompany the cultivation of a troubled consciousness.

These practices inevitably present myriad challenges as we are never outside of the colonial practices we are attempting to disrupt in our teaching. For instance, we may find ourselves complicit with exalting settler students' experiences of distress by considering their disclosures of privilege to be the end point. Without claiming innocence, we use these moments as the starting point for the political and ethical journeys that we hope our students take in their own practices (Chapman, 2013). We have been inspired by Vikki Reynolds's (2014) calls for 'structuring safety', which involves the collaborative development of ethical commitments that are jointly produced by students and teachers. The focus is on creating the conditions for mutual accountability, taking our differential privileges into account but without attempting to 'smooth over' differences or transgressions in favour of a polite, harmonious or a comfortable exchange. Once 'enough safety' (Reynolds, 2014, p. 8) has been created in the classroom, where we and our students are able to both take and tolerate risks, we invite students to bring forth stories from their own practices as a way to analyse impasses, uncertainties, contradictions and dilemmas from a perspective that situates these moments within the broader cultural, historical and socio-political context.

In our troubled consciousness pedagogies, we take seriously Rossiter's (2005) observation that everyday practice in the human services field is more likely to present students with situations where they experience themselves as 'failed heroes'. Specifically, we want our students to know that the elegant theories and tidy practice frameworks they learn in university do not always adequately prepare them for constructively responding in the face of uncertainty, power, structural violence, colonial relations or institutional hierarchies. Instead, through

a collaborative process, which holds each member of the learning community as able to respond in differing ways to the collectively generated ethics, we see our role as ‘thinking together’ with students to unpack settler colonialism/capitalism, the limits of their/our own professional expertise and the possibility for new forms of solidarity and collective action that are not yet known.

### Decolonising CYC praxis

Secondly, we argue that any politically and socially engaged child and youth care education must address settler colonialism. In this section we suggest ways to advance a child and youth care praxis that works towards decolonisation by both deconstructing child and youth care theories and values steeped in Eurocentrism (Saraceno, 2012), and prioritising a curricular approach that values Indigenous knowledges, identities and practices (Tuck, 2014; Simpson, 2014). While shifting curricular priorities, combined with cultivating troubled consciousness, provide avenues for politicising child and youth care education and practice, they also risk allowing ‘*conscientization* to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land’ (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 19, italics in original). The critique of conscientisation here reminds us that raising awareness and creating safe spaces to engage with the affective dimensions of confronting settler colonialism are at best parallel processes to the active work of repatriating land. We therefore seek pedagogical approaches that potentially or actively disrupt the ongoing occupation of Indigenous territory and more accurately reflect decolonising praxis.

As white, racialised and mixed-raced settlers, we see a need for contemporary child and youth care education to address implicit and explicit racist barriers to Indigenous student participation and success. In our writing and teaching, we constantly raise questions, without any straightforward answers, that disrupt our own practices, including: how might we explore avenues for decolonising child and youth care education by consulting with Indigenous and racialised scholars and at the same time not burden them with the work that we are responsible for as settlers? We can make our courses and programmes more accessible for Indigenous students by providing more supports, prioritising Indigenous student learning and participation, and recognising – in grading and participation – alternative ways of knowing and practising. How might we recognise the diverse ways that Indigenous students contribute to learning engagements through

traditional knowledge and community and land-based practices – including recognising and validating community and kinship work, oral traditions and knowledge, and diverse healing and cultural practices – in our assignment descriptions and grading criteria? Ultimately, we are learning to work with difference, putting the onus on ourselves to respectfully engage in the work of recognition and translation. At the same time, we always run the risk of cultural distortion, appropriation, codification and the fetishisation of Indigenous epistemologies.

As settler instructors we attempt the difficult and necessary task of unpacking our own locations within settler colonialism and learning to honour and structure safety for the diverse reactions people have to conversations on racism and colonisation. As part of our own and our students' healing and consciousness raising, we are learning to work with anger, resentment, shame, guilt and other politicised emotions related to colonisation – never losing sight of the fact that decolonisation is always about the repatriation of Indigenous land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this process, it is important for us to understand and make visible the similarities and differences between the histories of the Indigenous peoples of this land and our own people's colonial history and struggles for independence. Kouri and Skott-Myhre (2015) for example explore how vulnerability, endurance and affirmation are relational qualities that may provide settlers with avenues for exploring subjectivity and self-location outside of the colonial norms of denial, pity, appropriation and avoidance in relation to Indigenous peoples, knowledges and lands.

Our task in beginning to think of child and youth care education as a space for decolonialisation also involves thinking collectively with existing politicised praxis. We bring into our classrooms examples of how practitioners are engaging in decolonisation – not as exemplary or standardised practices that we want our students to follow, but as beginning points for discussion. For instance, we discuss Saraceno's (2012) work on 'transformative or liberatory models of praxis' that 'strive to engage community members in shifting from an individualized view of an issue or problem to one that is more collective and politicized' (p. 263). Such politicised child and youth care praxis begins by deconstructing the dominant theories, values and structures that shape practice, particularly notions of progress, economic development, and care founded on dominant whiteness, masculinity, and colonialism. Saraceno's (2012) work allows us to challenge 'the assumption that professionalized helping is better' than community problem solving and local solutions (p. 257), and to engage with politicised Indigenous frameworks as possible ruptures or avenues for escape from the

overwhelming Western epistemology that currently structures praxis and professionalism discourses (for examples, see de Finney, 2014, 2015; Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

### Crafting new subjectivities

The immense challenges that we have described above (and the many others we face today) require more than just awareness. For us, it is not enough to just inform students of the political, social and environmental issues young people face in the twenty-first century. Engaging and implicating ourselves in these challenges require a shift in our ways of being in, and knowing, the world around us. Since any work with young people is partially a practice of socialising and shaping their character and values (Foucault, 1978), the third conceptual move that we find productive for a politically and socially engaged child and youth care education is to actively shift the ethical and political sensibilities of those who will be participating in crafting 'next generation subjectivities'. In other words, engaging politically requires recognising that our work in child and youth care is ultimately about crafting subjectivities (Skott-Myhre, 2008); and that new identities and ways of being (subjectivities) that challenge the neo-colonial system and the neoliberal state are desperately required in our rather unjust world. We propose the challenge to 'do' (not just critique) something without falling into the trap of an omnipotent belief that we can find new techno-fixes to repair the injustices of settler colonialism, environmental degradation and our risky attachments to cognitive enhancement. To interrupt the cascade of neoliberal and neo-colonial subjectivities in which we are paid to spend our time training students to socialise children and youth to become productive and consuming neoliberal citizens, we might need to start experimenting with our students in the production of new subject positions that are not yet imagined within the colonial and capitalist modes of being (Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2015).

Again, we are not alone in this proposition. For instance, Skott-Myhre (2006) suggests 'becoming visible' (p. 219) and dismantling discourses of otherness, as practices of interrupting colonial and Enlightenment processes of subjectification. Visibility is the dominant ability to see, know, appropriate and exclude the other – historically functional through concepts of race, insanity, homosexuality, poverty and so on. Discourses and practices of othering – particularly of creating knowledge about the other – are situated in Enlightenment and colonial histories that function through visibilities (Kouri & Skott-Myhre, 2015).



Visibility of the other simultaneously protects those in power as their identities could remain unexamined or taken for granted. Becoming visible, for Skott-Myhre (2015), is a process of undoing majoritarian privilege by accounting for our own subjectivities, remembering our own histories and communities, and making ourselves open to scrutiny.

Nxumalo also pays close attention to subjectivities and suggests reconceptualising them in situated and relational ways. She proposes understanding subjectivities as emergent with the forces, rhythms, and relations that constitute them, as a way out of static understandings of identity and diversity typified in much multiculturalist discourse. Nxumalo (2012) critiques multicultural discourse in terms of the fixities it sets in motion through representations of difference and diversity predicated on the recognition and tolerance of cultural identities. By highlighting the multiple, creative, material-discursive and hybrid in subjectivity, Nxumalo argues that systemic forces that sustain racism and oppression can be made more visible in encounters, specifically highlighting the unpredictable and transformative reconfigurations of the bodies and intensities that constitute subjectivity.

Yet, resisting the call to craft oneself and others in accordance with settler colonialism and neoliberal capitalism is not a uniform process. We might build on the intersectionality frameworks that have been proposed for child and youth care to understand that differently situated subjects (de Finney, 2010; Little 2011; Yoon; 2012) have differing opportunities and consequences for performing alternative and fluid subjectivities. Furthermore, from an anti-colonial perspective, Grande (2004) reminds us that notions of fluidity have rarely benefited Indigenous peoples and 'in spite of its "democratic" promise, postmodernism and its ludic theories of identity fail to provide indigenous communities the theoretical grounding for asserting their claims as colonized peoples, and, more important, impede construction of transcendent emancipatory theories' (p. 112). Crafting subjectivities, therefore, is a contingent and highly situated and political process requiring careful and ongoing ethical and political analyses of historical and contemporary forces.

## **Risking Attachments in Child and Youth Care Education**

The twenty-first century requires new politics and ethical logics (Braidotti, 2013). In this article, we have outlined some of the ways in which we are reconfiguring what we do in child and youth care education to temporarily interrupt the demands and logics of colonialism and

neoliberalism. Specifically, we proposed three conceptual moves that we are using in our teaching and practice to reconfigure the colonial histories and tendencies of child and youth care practice:

- *cultivating a form of troubled consciousness;*
- *advancing a praxis that works towards decolonisation by both deconstructing theories and values steeped in Eurocentrism and prioritising a curriculum that values Indigenous knowledges, identities and practices; and*
- *actively shifting the ethical and political sensibilities of those who will be part of the crafting of 'next generation' subjectivities.*

Our intention is not to propose wide 'implementation' of the shifts we have outlined. Instead, this article is simply a proposal to continue to pursue the always already revolutionary potential of child and youth care (Skott-Myhre, 2012) in order to experiment with who we might become.

## Notes

- 1 At the time of this writing, Justice Murray Sinclair released the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The report documents how Canada's assimilationist policies, which included forcibly removing Indigenous children from their homes and placing them in church- and state-sponsored residential schools, and the theft of Indigenous lands, amounted to cultural genocide.
- 2 North American child and youth care is an applied field which has largely embraced Uri Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as a way of conceptualising the context of child development and locating points for intervention within a child's ecological system. Furthermore, child and youth care training has focused largely on individual-level interventions which are understood within the context of a child's life-space. The individual child is still the focal point of analysis, and although contextualised within nested systems of agents, forces, institutions, and history, the most embracing systems, those of the socio-cultural context and historical-temporal context, are often the least considered in child and youth care conceptualisation, practitioner training and intervention planning. While training practitioners to conceptualise and respond to individual children and youth is still the mainstay of child and youth care practice, current research and theory emphasises the need to situate the challenges Canadian children are facing within social processes.
- 3 Feminist, anti-racist scholar Sunera Thobani (2007) writes about the ways in which white people in Canada become exalted by their subject positions and how such identities are supported by government policies and other social practices.
- 4 Scientists refer to the anthropogenic environmental damage to the planet in current times as the Anthropocene. See Steffen et al. (2007).

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. London: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2014). Brick walls: Racism and other hard histories. Keynote address at 'Unsettling Conversations, Unmaking Racisms and Colonialisms', R.A.C.E. Network's 14th Annual Critical Race and Anticolonial Studies Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton. <https://vimeo.com/110952481>.
- Alfred, T., & Corntassel, J. (2005). Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism. *Wasáse: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom* (pp. 597–614). Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Anglin, J., Pence, A., Denholm, K., & Ferguson, R. (eds) (1990). *Perspectives in Professional Child and Youth Care*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Ball, J., & Pence, A. (2006). *Supporting Indigenous Children's Development: Community–University Partnerships*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Barnett, R. (2012). Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 31(1), 65–77.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Byrd, J. A. (2011). *The transit of empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical Inquiry*, 35(2), 197–222.
- Chapman, C. (2013). Cultivating a troubled consciousness: Compulsory sound-mindedness and complicity in oppression. *Health, Culture and Society*, 5(1), 182–98.
- Common World Childhoods Research Collective (2015) Common Worlds. <https://www.commonworlds.net>, date accessed 2 September 2015.
- de Finney, S. (2007). *NONG SILA: Working from Community Knowledge: Developing Aboriginal Adoption Strategies*. Victoria: Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services.
- de Finney, S. (2010). We just don't know each other: Racialized girls negotiate mediated multiculturalism in a less diverse Canadian city. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(5), 471–87.
- de Finney, S. (2014). Under the shadow of empire: Indigenous girls' presencing as decolonizing force. *Girlhood Studies*, 7(1), 8–26.
- de Finney, S. (2015). Playing Indian and other settler stories: Disrupting Western narratives of Indigenous girlhood. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 29(2), 169–81.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York, NY: Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1976.)

- Gaucher, N., Payot, A., & Racine, E. (2013). Cognitive enhancement in children and adolescents: Is it in their best interests? *Acta Paediatrica*, 102, 1118–24.
- Gibson, K., Rose, D.B., & Fincher, R. (2015). *Manifesto for living in the Anthropocene*. CA: Punctum Books.
- Grande, S. (2004). *Red pedagogy*. Lanhan, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Hagger, L., & Hagger Johnson, G. (2011). ‘Super kids’: Regulating the use of cognitive and psychological enhancement in children. *Law, Innovation and Technology*, 3(1), 137–66.
- Haraway, D. (2008). *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haraway, D. (2011). Speculative fabulations for technoculture’s generations: Taking care of unexpected country. *Australian Humanities Review*, 50, 95–118.
- Haraway, D. (2013). *Distinguished lecture*. Arizona State University, Institute for Humanities Research [video]. <http://ihr.asu.edu/news-events/news/2013-distinguished-lecturer-donna-haraway-reading-group>
- Hird, M.J. (2012). Animal, all too animal: Toward an ethic of vulnerability. In A. Gross & A. Vallyely (eds), *Animal others and the human imagination* (pp. 331–348). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hird, M.J. (2013). Waste, landfills, and an environmental ethics of vulnerability. *Ethics and the Environment*, 18(1), 105–24.
- Kivel, P. (2007). Social service or social change? In INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (eds), *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (pp. 129–49). Cambridge: South End Press.
- Knight, P. (2001). Complexity and curriculum: A process approach to curriculum-making. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(3), 369–81.
- Kouri, S. (2014). Conceptualizing self, identity, and subjectivity: Engagements with theories and theorists in child and youth care. Unpublished master’s thesis. University of Victoria, Victoria.
- Kouri, S. (2015). The canonical self and politicized praxis: A tracing of two concepts. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 6(4), 595–621.
- Kouri, S., & Skott-Myhre, H. (2015) Catastrophe: A transversal mapping of colonialism and settler subjectivity. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 5(4), 279–94.
- Latour, B. (2004). *The politics of nature: How to bring the sciences into democracy* (C. Porter, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1999.)
- Little, J. N. (2011). Articulating a child and youth care philosophy: Beyond binary constructs. In A. Pence and J. White (eds), *Child and Youth Care: Critical Perspectives on Pedagogy, Practice, and Policy* (pp. 3–18). Vancouver: UBC Press.

- McCaffrey, S. (2010). Kookum knew ... Exploring historical contexts: Aboriginal people, the justice system, and child welfare. *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*, 1(3/4), 340–7.
- Morgensen, S. (2011). The biopolitics of settler colonialism. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 1(1), 52–76.
- Newbury, J. (2009). Contextualizing child and youth care: Striving for socially just practice. *Relational Child and Youth Care*, 22(4), 20–9.
- Nikiforuk, A. (2010). *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*. Vancouver: David Suzuki Foundation.
- Nxumalo, F. (2012). Unsettling representational practices: Inhabiting relational becomings in early childhood education. *Child & Youth Services*, 33(3–4), 281–302.
- Reynolds, V. (2014). Centering ethics in group supervision: Fostering cultures of critique and structuring safety. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 1–13.
- Rose, D.B. (2011). *Wild dog dreaming: Love and extinction*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Rossiter, A. (2005). Discourse analysis in critical social work: From apology to question. *Critical Social Work*, 6(1). <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/discourse-analysis-in-critical-social-work-from-apology-to-question>
- Saraceno, J. (2012). Mapping whiteness and coloniality in the human service field: Possibilities for a praxis of social justice in child and youth care. *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 3(2/3), 248–271.
- Simpson, L. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 3(3), 1–25.
- Sinclair, Murray (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. [http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf).
- Skott-Myhre, H. (2006). Radical youth work: Becoming visible. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 35, 219–29.
- Skott-Myhre, H. A. (2008). *Youth and subculture as creative force: Creating new spaces for radical youth work*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.
- Skott-Myhre, H. (2012). Fleeing identity: Toward a revolutionary politics of relationship. *Child and Youth Services*, 33(3), 329–44.
- Skott-Myhre, K., and Skott-Myhre, H. A. (2011). Theorizing and applying child and youth care praxis as politics of care. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 24(1–2), 42–52.
- Skott-Myhre, K., and Skott-Myhre, H. (2015). Revolutionary love: CYC and

- the importance of reclaiming our desire. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 6(4), 581–94.
- Steffen, W., Crutzen, P., & McNeill, J. (2007). The Anthropocene: Are humans now overwhelming the great forces of nature?' *Ambio*, 36, 614–21.
- Thobani, S. (2007). *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409–27.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Tuck, E. & Yang, K. W. (eds). (2014). *Youth resistance research and theories of change*. New York: Routledge.
- White, J. (2007). Knowing, doing and being in context: A praxis-oriented approach to child and youth care. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 36, 225–244.
- White, J. (2015). An ethos for the times: Difference, imagination and the unknown future in child and youth care. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 6(4), 498–515.
- Yoon, J.-S. (2012). Courageous conversations in child and youth care: Nothing lost in the telling. *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*, 3(2–3), 164–86.