

Tuning into Child and Youth Care: An Audio Drama Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners Who Have Lived in Residential Placement

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This dissertation was created on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

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Abstract

Child and youth care (CYC) practitioners (CYCPs) who have lived in residential placement as children or youth represent an understudied and thus largely unknown cohort. This lack of knowledge has resulted in assumptions, generalizations, and unfounded claims impacting discourses, and potentially practices, within CYC. Based on the development of an original research method—audio drama inquiry—this sonic dissertation presents the first documented examination of the perspectives, experiences, and insights of 17 Canadian CYCPs “from care” (CYCPfC). Informed by research-based theatre, CYC theory, and care ethics, two audio drama series were created asking “what does residential placement experience do to CYCPs, and how do CYCPfC do CYC?” The resulting performances reveal frictions and desires related to working for, within, and at times against the same systems that one grew up in. CYCPfC articulate benefits resulting from their “lived experience,” such as identification, empathy, inimitable systemic knowledge, and motivations to initiate change within such systems. However, the audio dramas also reveal perils related to their personal histories, the institutions in which they work(ed), and the “the field” more broadly. Through greater understanding of CYCPfC, who provide insights, cautions, and learnings from their unique perspectives, this study advances our knowledge regarding what is *done* when *doing* CYC. Moreover, *Tuning into CYC* broadens existing frames of qualitative inquiry through explicating and demonstrating the theoretical and practical elements of audio drama inquiry.

Key words: care, children and youth, lived experience, audio drama inquiry, residential care, child and youth care

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I'm also grateful for all the faculty at the University of Victoria who taught me. My colleagues at Humber College who supported my sabbatical and filled in when I was not present. All the students I have taught at Humber who in turn have taught me so much about learning and the importance of lived experience in education. My CYC colleagues who encouraged me. And everyone who has, or will, listen to the recordings; may they inform your practice and your life.

Finally, I want to celebrate my committee. While doing this Ph.D. I have heard numerous stories of difficult, unpleasant, abusive, and horrendous experiences of doctoral students. Never once has this been my experience. Throughout this process Dr. White, Dr. Newbury, and Dr. Prendergast have provided support, willingness, guidance, insight, and encouragement to help me create the best possible dissertation that I could. Jennifer, you have always been available to talk through ideas, ask questions, offer knowledge, refocus direction, and provide wisdom. Janet, your care, reflexivity, honesty, and commitment toward others are what I strive for. Monica, you helped produce the conditions for my creativity to be supported institutionally, this incarnation would not exist without your belief in what could be. Thank you all.

Orientation to *Tuning into CYC*

This situating document orients listeners to *Tuning into Child and Youth Care: An Audio Drama Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners Who Have Lived in Residential Placement (Tuning into CYC)*. It outlines the different elements of the dissertation, suggests ways to engage with the material, provides context regarding the topics explored, and offers considerations towards hearing the findings. Audio drama inquiry is an emerging research method which blends applied theatre, qualitative inquiry, and audio fiction (Vachon & Woodland, 2021; Vachon, in press). The approach is informed by established research protocols and practices. Specifically, it offers a theoretically-grounded strategic approach to public knowledge generation that is situated within existing scholarship; it advances arguments through making knowledge claims; and meets well-established ethical standards and institutional regulations for conducting human research (Ormerod, 2018; Stenhouse, 1981; Vachon, in-press). Audio drama inquiry necessitates a different approach for inquirer(s) and audience than other forms of research inviting new considerations for how one conducts, participates, and responds.

Elements of the Dissertation

In addition to this orienting document, *Tuning into CYC* includes a number of other elements, which together creates an integrated whole.

- a website www.TuningIntoCYC.org
- two serialized audio dramas *ReFiled* (series 1) and *Hiring Care* (series 2)
- two articles (Vachon, 2020a; Vachon, 2021b) and two book chapters (Vachon, 2021a; Vachon, in press).

Each of these components serves to present a different perspective on the questions “what does residential placement experience do to CYCPs, and how do CYCPs do CYC?”.

The entry point for *Tuning into CYC* is the [website](#) which contains all of the elements in a single location for ease of access and navigation. Along with the official dissertation content, the website also contains supplementary materials such as additional publications, podcasts, and other resources related to the project.

Audio drama inquiry is a new way of conducting research, and, as such, requires new ways of engaging with the content. In addition to the intellectual work that all research entails, *Tuning into CYC* invites an intimate, reflexive, and emotional posture from those who listen to this sonic dissertation. For some, this may be a welcome alternative to the dehumanizing and distancing ways some research is presented; for others, it may be unsettling because of what it asks of the listener, resulting in a variety of responses, from confusion and dismissal to pleasure and hope.

A Sequentially Layered Process of Reading–listening

There are numerous ways to engage with *Tuning into CYC*, each offering an individually curated experience. For the examining committee, I suggest a sequentially layered process of reading and listening. Rather than entering through the website, committee members are asked to engage as follows:

1. Commence with reading this *Orienting Document for Tuning into CYC*
2. Read *From Experience: Child and Youth Care, Lived Experience, and Wounded Practitioners* (Vachon, 2020a)
3. Listen to the 13 episodes of *ReFiled*

4. Read *Audio Drama Inquiry: A Telling Method of Research* (Vachon, in press) and
5. Read *The Cost Is Unacceptable: Excerpts of an Arts-Based Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners from Care* (Vachon, 2021b)
6. Listen to the seven episodes of *Hiring Care*
7. Finally, read *Child and Youth Care Aesthetics and The Beauty of Relational Inquiry* (Vachon, 2021a).

Thinking of the constituent elements of *Tuning into CYC* through the lens of a traditional dissertation one can identify the requisite components. Specifically, the website can be understood as the container for the full inquiry, acting as the final (un)bounded publication. This orienting document serves as the introduction. The article, *From Experience* (Vachon, 2020a) provides contextualization, situates the work within the field of CYC, and provides a review of the literature. The three publications, *Audio Drama Inquiry* (Vachon, in press); *The Cost is Unacceptable* (Vachon, 2021b), and *Child and Youth Care Aesthetics and The Beauty of Relational Inquiry* (Vachon, 2021a) describe the original methodology. The two audio drama series, and the accompanying non-fiction interviews, represent the findings and analysis. They also address limitations and areas for further research.

Alternative Dissertations

The submission of doctoral dissertations that do not conform to a traditional single-subject monograph is a relatively new phenomenon. The expansion of formats comes in response to considering the purpose of doctoral dissertations, how scholarly information is being conducted and communicated, the shifting skills and interests of students, and a willingness of supervisors to be more “student centered” (Porter et al., 2018, pp. 4-6). Doctoral

studies are also impacted by, and contribute to, wide-ranging discussions regarding the purpose, legacy, agendas, and formats of research endeavours more broadly (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Leavy, 2020; Quaye, 2007; Skloot, 2010; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2014). In response to these interwoven factors, and through the creativity of PhD students and their supervisors, dissertations are slowly moving away from monographic hegemony towards format plurality. The two most common monograph alternatives are “manuscript submissions”, wherein the PhD candidate tenders published articles emanating from their doctoral research, and “portfolio submissions”, containing multiple components such as analytical writing, applied writing, and research (Porter et al., 2018; Queen’s University, 2021). Building on the broadening of acceptable structures, there have been numerous other “non-traditional” or “alternative” dissertation formats produced in recent years. A sampling of these submissions include [podcasting](#) (Williams, 2020), [graphic novels](#) (Sousanis, 2015), [digital portfolios](#) (Coleman, 2017), [music](#) (Cooper, 2015) [interactive digital interfaces](#) (Visconti, 2015), [location based mobile experiences](#) (Merandy, n.d.) a [52,000+ word punctuation free dissertations](#) (Stewart, 2015), [among many others](#). Some programs, such as Fine Arts, have long accepted submissions outside of the monograph, for example a PhD in creative writing requiring a [novel](#) (University of Calgary, 2021), or visual arts with a required [solo exhibition](#) component (York University, n.d.). [New programs](#) continue to emerge that push the boundaries of how dissertations are conceived and what is expected (X-University, n.d.).

These shifts in format reflect assiduous re-examinations across multiple disciplines regarding the process, impacts, and purpose of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Leavy, 2018; Leavy, 2020; Smith, 2012). Revealed in these examinations are a legacy of research-damaged

individuals and communities, along with critical questions regarding the information collected (Huaman & Martin, 2020; Smith, 2012). This has resulted in a demand for accountability “about the knowledge claims of disciplines and approaches, about the content of knowledge, about absences, silences and invisibilities of other peoples, about practices and ethics, and about the implications for communities of research” (Smith, 2012, p. 20). Changes resulting from this legacy have been driven by researchers and activists from adversely impacted populations, such as Indigenous peoples (Huaman & Martin, 2020; Smith, 2012; Tuck and Yang, 2012), Queer individuals (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019), women and girls (Leavy & Harris, 2019), disabled persons (Charlton, 1998), and Mad folks (Faulkner and Tallis, 2009; LeFrancois et al. 2013) to name only a few. These realities have catalyzed innovation among researchers looking for new ways to ethically consider topics, leading to a multitude of inquiry approaches and altering how research is conducted with, in, and from communities. The harms and limitations of traditional ways of conducting research have become so apparent that even the institutions overseeing and funding academic inquiries have shifted their practices, such as developing new ethical protocols when working with [Indigenous communities](#) (Government of Canada, 2018), actively “[support\(ing\) new approaches to research](#)” as a core objective in considering applications (Government of Canada, 2020, para. 4), and [awarding non-traditional forms of research](#), such as arts-based inquiry (Government of Canada, 2019).

Despite these promising changes, there are still multiple concerns and unanswered questions regarding non-traditional dissertation. These include questions about how to evaluate them, determine quality, and assess academic rigor. The logistics of physically submitting non-traditional formats to academic institutions and uncertainty about how the

dissertations will be archived remain challenging, and have led to a lack of acceptance by some within the larger scholarly community. Doubts about future employability if such approaches are used by doctoral candidates, have led to a reluctance by some supervisors to approve alternative formats (Patel, 2016; Porter et al., 2018, Thomas, 2015). Consequently, it still requires perseverance and potential professional risk for students, as well as supervisors, to move beyond the monograph, frequently resulting in significantly more work and time, than a more traditional approach - potentially deterring emerging creative scholars. It also requires evaluating the dissertation in ways that go beyond the traditional metrics of legitimacy, rigor, and career advancement.

Aesthetic Inquiries

The methods and approaches utilized during *Tuning into CYC* are explored in-depth through the accompanying publications (Vachon, 2021a; Vachon, 2021b; Vachon, in press). However, some additional context within this document may be valuable to orient the listener even further. Each audio drama was constructed using distinct practices, resulting in dramatically different stories, and revealing divergent perspectives. *ReFiled* drew on devised theatre or playbuilding processes, which can be understood as a production intended for performance “originally created through democratic processes of exploration utilizing many forms of improvisation” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 19) with members of a particular community, in this case a fluid group totalling seven CYCPfC. In contrast, *Hiring Care* used verbatim theatre techniques drawing on the exact words of 10 CYCPfC based on transcripts of recorded conversations. Verbatim, despite being a multifariously interpreted term in the theatre, is generally accepted as using the original words, artifacts, and documented texts of

actual people in the script and performance (Hammond & Steward, 2008; Vachon & Salvatore, in press).

I did not intend to create a verbatim audio drama. However, due to the impact of COVID-19 on those I was collaborating with and strict restrictions on movement and gatherings where I was living, alternative ways to develop, analyze, and present the materials were required. In consultation with my committee, I decided to work with the conversation transcripts and develop a verbatim audio drama for *Hiring Care*. This resulted in a novel, illuminating, and stimulating way to consider the perspectives of the 10 CYCPfC I spoke with. Verbatim audio drama inquiry offered revelatory ways beyond my expectations to analyze the research materials. Through the collaboration of actors, “reflective panels” (Fenge & Jones, 2012, Vachon, in press), and the intimate process of multiple script edits, I gained insights from the text that may not have been available through more traditional inquiry processes, or the devised theatre techniques used during *ReFiled*. Verbatim audio drama inquiry also provides a fresh way for end users to engage with conversation transcripts, different from say block quotes in a bound dissertation or peer-reviewed publications.

Care and Failure

Notwithstanding the above, the second series of the audio drama is an aesthetic disappointment to me and I am conflicted about releasing *Hiring Care*. The multifaceted considerations that these complex dynamics merit is beyond the scope of this orienting document. However, there are several points I wish the listener to be aware of as they engage with the recording. COVID adjustments resulted in numerous, and significant, technical ramifications. It was not possible to record in a studio, acoustically comparable locations, or with everyone using the same quality microphone. I decided to have people record

synchronously so there was a flow of voices and each character could respond emotionally and tonally to the others. This decision led to substantial constraints and dissimilarities caused by individual's internet, hardware, and location limitations. Despite purchasing some microphones for actors, this was not always possible and thus the sound quality is inconstant. While this mirrors the fictional setting in which *Hiring Care* takes place (internet and telephone-based conversation) the sonic world may become distracting, noisy, or even cacophonous for some listeners. Casting also became an issue. Some acting unions within Canada have special dispensations that allow student productions to hire union and non-union actors and pay them the same rate. However, since *Hiring Care* was a production emanating from a British Columbia university but was recorded in Ontario, I was unable to take advantage of provincially proscribed accommodations. This meant that unionized actors I had workshoped with were not able to do the actual recording. This resulted in some unexpected last-minute casting changes which I hear in the performances. In addition to these issues, there are also multiple script and directing choices I would alter if time and resources allowed.

My decision to release *Hiring Care* for assessment by my PhD committee, is informed by notions of care and failure. I begin with Prendergast's (2014) invitation to think deeply about "misperformance", the "poetics of failure" and "how (un)planned mistakes, errors – even disasters – may befall those who perform, including the ever-pressing potential aesthetic disaster of a failed performance" (p.77). In her work, artists, audiences, and academics are provoked to consider what happens when things go wrong, and suggests that they (we) "may benefit from the aesthetic and critical possibilities that embracing and exploring failure in performance present" (p. 79). Creating space, intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically to

consider one's artistic failures is a difficult turn for many artists and academics; and it may well be even harder for audiences, readers, and doctoral dissertation committee members who are trained to seek out beauty, cohesion, and, the perhaps impossible, perfection.

In response to the success normative, Halberstam (2011) introduced "queer failure", writing:

The Queer Art of Failure dismantles the logics of success and failure with which we currently live. Under certain circumstances failing . . . may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world (p.2-3).

This queer utopic reading of those aspects of ourselves, our work, and our world we don't think are good enough, gives us permission to consider the aesthetics, ethics, and purpose of the academic project we know as the doctoral dissertation. Halberstam suggests that failure offers different rewards than "success", including a way to "escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" (p.3), an idea with potential reverberations in CYC, academia, and pointedly, child protection services.

Releasing *Hiring Care* is also informed by considerations of what it means to "perform the aesthetics of care" (Thompson, 2020). Thompson wrote that, "In process, design and execution, the arts, I suggest, can promote or exhibit inter-human forms of care that demonstrate a mutually reliant, selfless and constructive form of sociality" (p. 215). Through paying "close attention to the effects of our preferred practices" I "follow" what I, and by extension *Tuning into CYC* is "*doing*" (White, 2015, p. 509, italics in original) and see that ethics and aesthetics of care have been, and continue to be, performed throughout the process, design, execution, and beyond this PhD (Cherry & Vachon, 2020; Vachon, in press; Vachon

2020b). In attending to the interdependent sociality of audio drama inquiry, there is an ethical responsibility to those I spoke with, those who acted in the recording, those who improvised, challenged, listened, watched, critiqued, took risks, and were vulnerable at multiple moments of *Hiring Care*, including myself. In considering the political nature of the aesthetics of care, Thompson (2020) wrote, the “processes and products/productions that fail to acknowledge the importance of care, and the quality of relations that are part of different projects, can also be the source of injustice” (p. 215). To deny the release of *Hiring Care* risks moving towards a destructive sociality.

Weaving these elements together leaves me with profound, unanswered questions regarding care, ethics, aesthetics, and failure within inquiry, audio drama, and academia more broadly. This may be a disastrous position for a doctoral candidate as they prepare to “defend” their research; or, perhaps, it is an opening for a new, creative, cooperative, and surprising way to share what they have, and have not yet, learned. Audio drama inquiry is inescapably mutually reliant, it cannot exist without interdependence, each participant bringing aspects of their unique self to the project. The agreement with my collaborators throughout *Tuning into CYC* was to provide new insights into the experiences of CYCPfC and develop a map for audio drama inquiry. Both of these have happened. I stumble on the tension between performing an aesthetics of care and performance aesthetics. If we think of the aesthetics of care as more than a performance, and consider audio drama inquiry as an interdependent project in which the final recording is a step—and not the final one by far—then the failure that is the current incarnation of *Hiring Care* might be seen as a breach in the norm of resonance. In carefully

listening to the poetics of failure within *Hiring Care*, one can hear how cacophony, noise, and dissonance is the resonance of success within many PhD's

Context of Study

Child and Youth Care is a practice-oriented discipline that “centers on relational practice (Garfat, 2008), life space intervention (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013), strength-based approaches (Oliver & Charles, 2014, 2015, 2016), and reflective, ethical praxis (White, 2008)” (Gharabaghi & Charles, 2019, p. 1). While non-family members have presumably been helping to take care of young people for as long as there have been people, the professionalization of child and youth care-taking is a much more recent phenomenon (Chapman & Withers, 2019). CYC as a distinct area of academic study and training exists only in Canada, South Africa, and the UK. Perhaps because of its limited scholarly base, there has been little research in Child and Youth Care. The specific study of practitioners (CYCPs) who have had childhood experiences similar to those they work with has been all but non-existent (Vachon, 2010; Vachon, 2020a). This is an area that has been studied in other professional helping fields such as social work (Regehr et al., 2001), mental health (Oats et al, 2017), nursing (Conti-O’Hare, 2004), criminal justice (Barrenger, 2019) and addiction (White, 2000a, 2000b) among others. These studies have frequently focused on difficult, traumatic, stigmatizing, or other challenging situations such as hospitalization, loss, drug abuse, violence, adverse childhood experiences (ACE), and related events or circumstances that the helping professional has experienced. Very little, if any, of this literature discusses “positive” shared experiences. While this may seem obvious, it is noteworthy that the focus begins with a deficit-based or pathologizing orientation, as opposed to a health, wellness, or strength focus. This orientation may reflect the founding influence of

the wounded healer mythos (Jung, 1951), which informs a significant portion of this discourse.

Be that as it may, the historical pathological positioning of lived experience may be distorting research in this area. Residential placement is different from experiences of violence, ACE, trauma, and addiction, in that residential *care* is ostensibly offered to support children, youth, and families. Thus, it is curious, perhaps telling, potentially distorting, that “care experience” is frequently conflated with “wound” discourse (Brown & Seita, 2009; Mickelborough, 2016).

While the reasons a young person enters the care system often fall with an ACE framework and those in care tend to have a higher ACE score than the “general population” (Brown et al., 2019; Tregeagle et al., 2019), one would hope that the adverse, violent, traumatic experiences would be what led to the placement, not a feature of residential care itself.

Yet, the placement experience is frequently discussed as inherently difficult, traumatic, stigmatizing, or otherwise challenging (Brown & Seita, 2009; Mickelborough, 2016; Provincial Advocate, 2012). Indeed, at least one person chose not to be part of this study because they saw their time in care as largely positive and self-selected out thinking those experiences were not relevant given current child welfare discourses. Fortunately, this was not always the case and some of the people who participated in *Tuning into CYC* bring a counter narrative to the dominant perspective. There is also growing recognition from researchers that “Care Leavers want more research on their ‘strengths’ and less on their ‘deficits’” (International Care Leavers Convention, 2020, p. 43). *Tuning into CYC* explores the experiences of child and youth care practitioners from care (CYCPfC), not the experiences of placement per se; however, placement experience is essential to becoming a CYCPfC and thus infuses the study. In the audio dramas,

one hears multiple, differing, and at times contradictory perspectives of placement and how that shapes the practice of CYC when one is from care.

While commonly beginning with adverse shared experiences, “lived experience” literature has looked at numerous elements including the benefits of related experiences (Adame et al. 2017; Eskreis-Winkley et al., 2014; Faulkner, 2016), critiques and cautions (Harris et al., 2016; Voronka, 2016; Zingaro, 2009), impacts (Melkman et al., 2015), ethics (Behnke, 2015; Faulkner & Tallis, 2009), employment (Marino, 2014), stigma (Marino, 2014), research (Faulkner & Tallis, 2009), and leadership (Sandhu, 2019). This literature exists within a broader zeitgeist of increasingly vocal and pressing recognitions regarding historical and ongoing discrimination, such as discussions of [police violence](#) (APTN, 2021), [slavery](#) (New York Times, 2021) and [global inequality](#) (The Guardian, 2021); and is being developed alongside the formation of organizations focused on what particular [social locations](#), [experiences](#), and histories bring to helping professions including [CYC](#). The discussion of lived experience has recently extended outside of traditional helping professions and is being picked up by business, board governance, and beyond, with people proclaiming ambitions global transformative agendas such as, “Uniting lived, learned and practice experience to create the wisdom necessary to solve the social, economic and environmental challenges of our time” (Knowledge Equity, n.d. para. 1).

Naming Experience

Revealingly, nomenclature shifts as the discourse of “experience” travels from psychotherapy through social services, academia, activist communities, popular culture, and into business. Reflecting the purposes and people it serves, one sees wounded healer (Farber,

2017; Jung, 1951; Phelan, 2009), parallel experiences (Eskreis-Winkley et al, 2014), similar experiences (Faulkner, 2016), shared experiences (Adame et al. 2017), lived experience (Conchar & Repper, 2014; Grant, 2014; Sandhu, 2019), peer-led/peer support (Dorset Mental Health Forum, n.d.; Faulkner & Basset, 2012), system wise (Ali et al, 2020), first voice (Project Outsiders, n.d.), survivor (LeFrançois 2013; Swerdfager, 2016), LEx (an acronym for lived experience) (FosterClub, 2020), PLE (people with lived experience) (Developing Together, 2018), and knowledge equity (Knowledge Equity, n.d.). Each of these formations perform different functions for the users and frames the discourse in particular ways.

The construction of wounded healer can be traced back to Jung (1951) and his psychodynamic Chiron myth-inspired positioning of the therapist who draws on their past wounds to heal the patient in front of them. While Jung may be considered the starting point for the term, he was not the first to explore these ideas nor to consider hurt as a path to healing others (Jackson, 2001), as is evidenced by his use of a story created over 2500 years ago. Within the wounded healer trope, the healer need not share nor disclose their own background, yet through the quest to heal themselves (which is an important element in the myth of Chiron) they have learned enough to heal others (even while they may remain wounded). This is a particular romantic and individualistic framing of the helping relationship, one that has been critiqued over the years and seems to be falling out of favour, both as term and construct of wellness (Conchar & Repper, 2014). Nomenclature changes track shifts in understandings of wounds, trauma, community, experience, and healing. Language such as parallel, similar, or shared moves beyond the individual helper/helped frame and invites reconsidering the place of adverse, difficult, or challenging experiences. With these terms, we

begin to understand commonality of experience in new ways, no longer exclusively the restrictive helper/helped, but each party being at different stages of a healing continuum. While this may be a more inclusive recovery frame it is not without its shadow. The professional moves from healer alone to becoming model, guide, inspiration, and potential mentor (Esping, 2014; Morgan & Lawson, 2015; Phelan, 2009). The crumbling of distinction between professional and patient becomes apparent in this manifestation, with all the accompanying concerns regarding boundaries, over-identification, counter-transference and the like. The natural extension of this is seen through experience moving away from the domain of the professional and into communities in the form of peer support and peer-led programs across a multitude of sectors (Faulkner & Basset, 2012; Polvere, 2011). Peer models have become so popular that in some circumstances, for example mental health treatment programs, they are seen as an important, at times necessary, step in an individual's healing process (Conchar, & Repper, 2014; Faulkner & Basset, 2012).

If we follow the language being used, from wounded healer through parallel, similar, and shared, and into peer, these could all comfortably sit within the term "lived experience", which has become the dominant phrase to discuss these ideas. As traditionally used in academia, lived experience carries somewhat different connotations than are being employed here. Within phenomenology (Van Manen, 1997), research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), and communication studies (Oxford Reference, 2021) for example, lived experience is understood as a way of knowing based on the events, interactions, and observations one has lived. This neutral understanding is altered within the wounded healer lineage, which carries a focus on difficult events that one has learned, grown, or transformed from experiencing.

As lived experience discourse evolves, language changes to reflect particular framings and political orientations. In what could be seen as a parallel to early mutual support activist movements such as in disability (Charlton, 1998), addiction (Lappas, 2012, White, 2000a), or AIDS activism (Schulman, 2021), some have adopted language that locates experiences, backgrounds, and positionalities with a more activist orientation, such as system wise (Ali et al, 2020), first voice (Project Outsiders, n.d.), child welfare change-makers (Mickelborough, 2016, p.4), and survivor (Adame et al, 2017). For others lived experience is seen through a business, leadership, or career focus, for example “foster care alumni” (Seita, 2009, p. 24) or “LEx-leaders” who draw on their “knowledge equity” to “invigorate and connect human wisdom and leadership to catalyse transformational change” (Knowledge Equity, n.d.). The two divergent framings of experience can be heard, and tensions felt, at several points within the accompanying audio dramas.

Rationale for Study

This research is being done to fill a gap that exists in CYC knowledge regarding those *from working within*, as evidenced by the extant literature (Vachon, 2010; Vachon, 2020a). While little research exists regarding CYCP who have had adverse experiences while growing up, assumptions exist regarding the presence of CYCPs with such experiences and their impacts on those they work with (Allsopp, 2012; Melkman et al., 2015; Phelan, 2009; Smart & Digney, 2016). Research from other fields clearly shows that this is a complex area of study with multiple implications for practice, pedagogy, and policy (Adame, 2014; Conchar & Repper, 2014; Farber, 2017; Voronka, 2016). Yet despite the assumptions, complexity, and implications,

no existing research has been conducted that brings CYCPfC together to collectively generate, analyze, and theorize what it means to be “from care” and to work within Child and Youth Care.

Hearing Findings

In most qualitative dissertations a significant portion of the written document is consumed with the researcher elaborating and discussing their findings. Researchers layer their analytical tools over the data to reveal what they perceive as the relevant ideas discovered from their years of work. This is then read by others who consider the methodology and arguments made. Arts-based inquiries (ABI) require a different approach from researcher and audience. Like all forms of research, audio drama inquiry draws on particular analytical tools and is filtered through the researcher(s) biases, contexts, training, and experiences (Vachon & Woodland, 2021, Vachon, in press). For *Tuning into CYC*, choices were made regarding what to include and what to leave out, words have been contextualized, ideas have been highlighted, and narratives have been developed. This is not dissimilar to the editing which happens in all research processes (for more discussion on this see Vachon, 2021b). One of the things that audio drama inquiry encourages is for the listener to hear the data without being presented with a definitive conclusion regarding what the data means. Thus, each listener will “discover” their own “findings” and, in turn . . .

. . . is asked to hear the words spoken, consider how they are edited, listen for what the stories reveal, and undertake their own subjective analysis emanating from their unique positionality. Each listener will hear differently the vast array of topics addressed in the audio dramas, such as stigma, trauma, healing, self-identity, anxiety, boundaries, racism,

benefits and limitations of lived experience, readiness to work, doubt, disclosure, systemic barriers, safety, and care. (Vachon, 2021b, p.101)

My experience has been that I hear different things depending on when I listen and what else is engaging me at that time. Sometimes while listening, I think about the lived experience literature and hear congruence with many of the topics identified above, such as benefits, critiques and cautions, impacts, ethics, employment, stigma, and leadership. Other times, I think more about the state of CYC and our need to continue addressing ongoing racism, discrimination, power imbalances, misogyny, colonialism, and white supremacy, all topics that come up in the narratives, particularly *Hiring Care*. Yet other times, I consider what was present in the conversations but did not make it into these two audio dramas, such as the role of non-human relationships, futurity, grief, and family. And yet other times when listening, my mind focuses in on how I can take these ideas and apply them to my work teaching CYC, while at other times I think deeply about how audio drama works as research and ponder its possibilities, limitations, and what can be done to make it more effective.

The listener of these audio dramas is presented with narratives of CYCPfC, which they will layer upon their own narratives, to hear things that I might never have considered and might not even have access to hear. This orienting document is written to serve as a guide for how to engage with this sonic dissertation. My suggestion, my hope, is that you listen from who and where you are.

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From Experience: Child and Youth Care, Lived Experience, and Wounded Practitioners

Wolfgang Vachon

Abstract

This paper looks at writing related to those who have been service recipients and are now working as service providers. The discussion will commence by exploring how the concept(s) of “lived experience” is taken up in Child and Youth Care (CYC) literature. Lived experience has become a frequently used nomenclature across many disciplines yet remains amorphous in its application. There is a perception in CYC that lived experience of practitioners is relevant and prevalent (Allsopp, 2012; Phelan, 2009; Smart & Digney, 2016), yet there is minimal empirical support for these claims. The author discusses the current state of writing on lived experience and the concept of the wounded healer in CYC, identifies absences in CYC literature, and presents a foundation for further considerations regarding the implications of these concepts for Child and Youth Care.

Keywords

lived experience, wounded healer, practitioners, self

Lived Experience in Child and Youth Care

In Child and Youth Care, there has been little writing about those "from the system" working in the system (Vachon, 2010). A 2018 search of www.CYC-Net.org (CYC-Net) for the term "lived experience" (with quotation marks) returned 54 results, "wounded healer," seven. CYC-Net is an online portal of CYC related documents, including thousands of archived texts going back several decades. It is important to note that there are many texts related to CYC that are not available, or cited, on CYC-Net. This site is not being used as a definitive or sole resource for this paper; it is being presented here as a reference point. Most of the documents discussed below come from outside of CYC-Net.

While many of the documents returned from the CYC-Net search identify the importance of lived experience, few explicitly discuss a lived history directly parallel to those one works with (although some do). In the 54 identified texts, lived experience was frequently framed as a tool, or aspect of self which could be operationalized within a relational context. For example, Phelan (2004) writes about the *use of lived experience* when working with families, and more than a decade later, Skott-Myhre (2017b) discusses "the ability to *put our lived experience to work*" (p. 34, italics added). Outside of this instrumental application of the practitioner operationalizing their lived experience, a second way of considering the topic was being part of the lived experiences of young people (Garfat, 2003; Krueger, 2004; Whittaker, 2003). We might think of this as living experience or being in the "life space" of those we work with – the physical, mental, relational, and virtual places that young people exist and live their lives (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013). The central idea present in these documents is that to be with young people in their life space requires "participating with people as they live their lives" (Garfat and Fulcher, 2011). These texts do not explicitly speak about the lives of the CYC practitioner (CYCP), but rather focus on the lived experiences that young people and families are having, and the importance of the CYCP being part of these experiences.

A third grouping identified, are personal narratives of CYCPs own lived experiences (Masson, 2000; Munroe, 2016; Tone, 2016). These could be sub-divided into two (at times overlapping) categories of practitioners reflecting upon their childhood, and practitioners reflecting upon their practice. For example, Tone (2016) writes about working in a school board and informs the reader that, "Not too many years before this, I was one of those kids who needed a CYC in the classroom to manage my defiant behaviour" (p. 39). Here we see reflection on childhood leading to reflection on practice. For Tone (2016), these two elements are essential and interconnected. Part of his

motivation to enter into Child and Youth Care were his own positive experiences with CYCPs and witnessing the “exceptional work they [CYCPs] accomplished with the young people they worked with” (p. 40).

Positive experiences of care as motivation to become a CYC practitioner are not always present in first-person narratives. Chung (2017) writing while a high school student planning on attending university to study Child and Youth Care states:

I know the system is not perfect because I was once the ‘bad’, ‘unlovable’, ‘out of control’, ‘impossible to help’ child in care. I’ve had five different CAS workers, been kicked out of two foster homes, lived in a girls’ group home and been in psychiatric wards. The system (e.g. CAS workers, residential counsellors, foster parents and doctors) has let me down and I know I’m not the only youth out there who feels this way” (p. 11).

Rather than focusing on the positive impact of CYC, Chung's (2017) motivation is to address what does not work. The negative experiences have motivated her goal “to ensure all youth in care in Canada and one day worldwide receive humane, compassionate and caring support and help from the system and are treated like any other children in a loving home would” (p. 11). While coming from different perspectives, each credits their system experiences as informing the decision to become a CYCP. While outside the scope of this paper, it is striking how lived experience is retrospectively seen through the self-pathologizing language that both Tone (2016) and Chung (2017) use. How CYCPs with system involvement perceive and understand that past is an area worth exploring more within Child and Youth Care.

Munroe (2016), takes a different tack in looking at lived experience. Rather than focusing on her past as a system involved young person, she contributes to the “CYC-in-practice” literature (Krueger, 2015). Monroe (2016) addresses her experiences of racism, xenophobia, and misogyny in CYC education, reflecting upon and analyzing how living as a racialized immigrant woman has affected her schooling and impacted her practice. She uses this to challenge white supremacy and gender discrimination in Child and Youth Care. There has been a significant and essential rise in CYC discourse looking at lived experience through identity categorizations (see, for example, the work of Child and Youth Care Alliance for Racial Equity (CARE)). These come from practitioners who

describe their lived experiences of being minoritized in life and, often like Munroe specifically in CYC (Batasar-Johnie, 2017; de Finney, Palacios, Mucina, & Chadwick, 2018; Yoon, 2012), and from those who grapple with their social location(s) of privilege as CYCPs (Mackenzie, 2019; Skott-Myhre, 2017a; Spencer, 2019).

Wounded Healer Discourse in Child and Youth Care

While lived experience has recently become a default term referring to any number of life events related to one's identity, position, or practice, "wounded healer" has been used at least since the 1950s (Jung, 1951). Wounded healer refers specifically to those who draw upon their past experiences in working therapeutically with others. The wounded healer framing, which comes out of psychoanalysis, exists in addiction (White, 2000), nursing (Conti-O'Hare, 2002), psychotherapy (Farber, 2017), and other related fields. Searching "wounded healer" on CYC-Net in 2018, returned only seven "hits": one an inactive link, one a passing mention on a biographical description page, and two the same text. A more recent search (February 2020), without the quotes returned 25 hits, but upon reading did not significantly increase the relevant number of articles. Based upon these searches, five articles were identified that discuss the phrase (Allsopp, 2012; Fox, 2017; Phelan, 2009; Smart and Digney, 2016; Vachon 2010), and two pieces contain a passing mention (Gharabaghi, 2019; Snell, 2018).

Smart and Digney (2016) present what they call the "good, bad, and ugly" elements of the wounded healer in CYC practice. For the good, they mention ideas of credibility, knowledge, and support. For the bad, they wonder whose needs are being met when wounded CYCPs choose to practice, and the potential self-serving drives of the CYCP. And for the ugly, they contemplate that one's own wounds may be "reactivated" and suggest CYCPs may experience compassion fatigue. As will be seen below, these are also familiar tropes of lived experience discourse, be it in CYC, psychotherapy, nursing, social work, or related disciplines. Gharabaghi (2019) in a piece about rebranding CYC, suggests that it does not benefit the field to focus on wounded healers, and writes, "Among other concepts that do us no good talking about, even if they are in fact important, are 'self care', 'wounded healers', 'child or youth centered', 'voice', and many others... '[I]f you're wounded, get help'" (p. 11-12). In both of the above framings we see a tendency to focus on the negative elements of the wounded. A position which (while beyond the scope of this article) would benefit from a disability or Mad Studies orientated analysis.

In the limited CYC literature discussing wounded healer, it is not uncommon for authors to claim that many such people are working in Child and Youth Care (Phelan, 2009; Smart and Digney, 2016), yet provide minimal or only anecdotal support. For example, in a special issue of CYC-Online about supervision, Fox (2017) writes, "people with unfortunate personal histories are more likely to apply for work in our field and other 'helping professions'" (p.11). Fox (2017) makes this claim without presenting any evidence. Rather than empirical support, CYC authors discussing this area seem to rely on observation and conversation, "this might be a bit of generalisation, but anecdotally at least a straw poll has shown us that a surprising number of people caring for troubled kids have suffered similar adversity" (Smart and Digney, 2016, p.35). I am not disputing that there may be many "people caring for troubled kids have suffered similar adversity" or that "people with unfortunate personal histories are more likely to apply for work in our field and other 'helping professions'", only that there is a paucity of data to support these claims in CYC.

While not empirically robust, stories can be evocative, and perhaps more engaging to the reader than statistics. For an article about CYC in South Africa, in a section titled "The Value of the 'Wounded Healer'" (p.33), Allsopp (2012) tells the story of a South African CYCP working with a family of five facing multiple challenges. The Smith family lives in a lean-to with "almost no income at all" (p. 34); the mother has been diagnosed with TB; mother, father (who is also drinking problematically), and infant child are all showing indications of HIV; and the two eldest children are not going to school because the family cannot afford the fees. Nomsa, the CYCP, embodies the wounded healer trope, being "from the very community where the Smith family lives, (she) was not daunted by the over whelming and apparently intractable hopelessness of this family's circumstances, and she set to work right away" (p. 34). After securing housing, increasing the family income through additional subsidies, and diagnoses of HIV for mother, father, and baby, all were "... placed on medication, and Nomsa, herself infected with the virus and familiar with the regime of antiretroviral treatment, supported the family in successfully administering their medication" (p. 34). This story exemplifies the romantic, almost superhuman, promises of the wounded healer, and the challenge with trying to measure any notion of lived experience. What Nomsa did for the family (which included much more than is written here), was life-transforming, likely lifesaving, and she is clearly a highly effective and caring CYCP. However, based upon this piece, it is unknown how she did or did not bring her lived experience to the family. It is unstated if she shared her HIV status, if they

already knew, or if it in any way directly impacted her work (medication administration is learned, and hardly requires one to have the same conditions as those they administer to).

These critiques are presented not to minimize in any way the importance and efficacy of her work. Rather it is to recognize the benefits and limitations of narratives such as these. One can easily imagine the “ugly” that Smart and Digney (2016) raise being present with Nomsa, but not included in this story, specifically wounds being “reactivated” and compassion fatigue setting in. Allsopp (2012) calls her article a “Commentary” (p. 29) and she writes it with the intention that people from other parts of the world can learn from the CYC practice that is happening in South Africa. It is an informative and useful article, and Child and Youth Care practice in South Africa is arguably the most “advanced” of anywhere in the world, although certainly not without significant challenges. There is indeed much to learn from what CYC is doing in South Africa. However, it is not at all clear that what makes Nomsa effective in her practice is her lived experience. Stories, like the one presenting Nomsa, productively complicate the idea of lived experience. The reader wonders what phenomena exist behind or underneath the experience and what has Nomsa made of her adversity (M. Hoskins, personal communication, March 29, 2018). Such questions are impossible to assess in Allsopp's piece, because "Nomsa's" perspective is conspicuously absent in the article.

Self in Child and Youth Care

“Self” is a common topic in CYC literature (3,380 hits on CYC-Net, February 2020). Some have argued it is an essential element of Child and Youth Care practice (Burns, 2012; Fewster, 1990; Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010) and it has a long history within CYC education. Kouri (2014) points out that self “has been central to North American CYC for at least the past 40 years” (p. 2). The commonly employed phrase “use of self” (Garfat & Fulcher, 2011; Mattingly, Stuart, & VanderVen, 2010) is premised in the idea of drawing upon one’s experiences, as a route to effective practice. The centering of self in CYC can be seen in the introduction by Garfat and Fulcher (2012) to their edited book *Child and Youth Care in Practice*, where, on page 1, they claim, “...Child and Youth Care practice is about How you are; Who you are; When you do; What you do” (p.1, formatting changed). On a basic level, of course, there is no CYC without self (nor any employee in any job); yet CYC actively and explicitly centers self as a requirement to the work.

The idea of self-drawing upon lived and learned experience to guide one's practice runs throughout CYC literature and education. This can be seen in the CYC paradigm known as "knowledge, skills, self" (KSS), taught for many years, until the past decade, at UVic's School of Child and Youth Care (University of Victoria, 2011). KSS appears to have shifted into the "praxis model...knowing, being, doing" as the paradigm of choice at UVic (University of Victoria, 2010). This praxis model, defined by White (2007) as being "ethical, self-aware, responsive and accountable action" (p. 226), continues to center self as the fulcrum of practice. The acronym ASK "the aspects of self, the skills, and the knowledge that are part of knowing, doing, and being" (Stuart, 2013, p.111) finds a way to integrate these two concepts. Throughout this lineage, self is essential and central. The self, made up of our past, present, and future (in the form of expectations, desires, goals, etcetera), guides one through the relationships and decisions that being a CYCP entails

...the day-to-day challenges within the life of the child are not problems to be remediated; they are the opportunities through which the child may come to recognize, understand, and transform his or her emotional, cognitive, and behavioural patterns. For this to occur, the child's authentic experience needs to be seen, heard, and verified by those adults who assume parental and developmental responsibilities... This means that the significant adults must be sufficiently secure, centred, and contained within their own sense of Self to recognize the child as a unique and separate being, while offering the teaching and training essential for the child's emotional, cognitive, and social development (Fewster, 1999/2009, para. 36).

In the above formulations, self is about knowing who we are and our skills, which (ideally) allows us to be present with those we work with (and ourselves) in order to use self with young people and families towards doing.

White (2015) draws attention to a shift in CYC constructions and applications of self. The apolitical and decontextualized position "that self is the vehicle through which knowledge and skill are filtered, translated, and actualized" (Garfat & Ricks, 1995, p. 396), sees self as both neutral, and operational. This position assumes that practitioners know what is "right and wrong," as though there is a singular understanding of morality. For Garfat and Ricks, (1995), *ethical practice* and "*good clinical practice*" are both

“driven by the self” (p. 396, italics added). The self knows what to do and how to do it, even if it does not always follow right action.

Lived experience is a central element of what our self comprises, yet lived experience has very particular meanings in the context of CYC and allied fields. It refers not to every moment that we have ever lived, but rather, to particular moments, moments that are parallel to those experienced by those we work with. Moments, that for many, have caused wounds.

The Wounded Healer and Lived Experience in Related Literature

Conchar and Repper (2014) undertook a systematic review of the literature in mental health which discussed the idea of the "wounded healer." After identifying 835 initial articles, their final examination included 125. From the analysis, the two biggest (of six) topics they identified were: first, the idea that the individual needs to self-heal in order to be a healer of/for others; and second, discussions on the reasons that wounded healers choose to work in the fields they do. Regarding this second topic, the majority of writing they analyzed indicated that people (wounded healers) enter into helping/counselling/therapeutic/mental health fields due to influences from their own childhood experiences.

As previously mentioned, the notion that people enter into social service fields due to past experiences, and in particular “wounds” or difficult times as children/youth, is a common theme in CYC writing related to this topic (Phelan, 2009; Smart & Digney, 2016; Fox, 2017). This perception also extends beyond the published literature. In conversations I’ve had with faculty of two different universities teaching CYC in western Canada, professors from each school independently told me “about 30% of students have some sort of related lived experience” to those they will be working with. Neither faculty member could point to any specific data to support these claims. As discussed above, there is limited CYC literature in this area. However, one study that does speak directly to CYC was by Melkman, Mor-Salwo, Mangold, Zeller, and Benbenishty (2015). Researchers conducted and analyzed autobiographical interviews of 28 young people (from Germany and Israel) who had previously been in residential placements. The authors coded the interviews for examples of "helping others/becoming a helper," which included helping with family members, volunteering, or as a career choice. Of those 22 who coded as helping, the most common helping field people entered was child and youth care (presented in the article as lower case), although no number was provided. In discussing the motivations for helping, Melkmen et al. (2015) suggest:

Pre-conditioning experiences while growing up were linked to a mix of motivations described by the care leavers as leading them to engage in helping behaviors. These are grouped around three categories: (1) feeling obliged to help, (2) feeling competent in the field of helping, and (3) feeling the desire to help. (p.43).

Based on interview analysis, Melkmen et al. (2015) posit four benefits of helping others for interview subjects. According to the authors, helping others, (1) offers a possibility to work through the past; (2) distracts people from their own problems; (3) enhances their sense of normality, and (4) enables them to stay connected with others (p.44). This study raises intriguing questions about people with lived experience navigating choice, context, self, and healing.

In discussing the notion of healing, Melkmen et al. (2015). write:

The choice made by many of the young people to work with similar children and adolescents in care or from adverse backgrounds provided them with an opportunity to relive past experiences, only with the roles reversed...returning to these difficult places as older, more mature people and within the framework of their role as the responsible adult helped them to gain insight into their own experiences and gain a sense of control and competency (p. 44).

Melkmen et al. (2015) posit that the people they looked at started helping others, at least partially, as a way to help themselves. As we saw in Conchar and Repper (2014), the notion of working as a route to healing is a common leitmotif in wounded healer literature. It is also, apparently, fraught territory. The fear of the unwell, damaged, and potentially harmful practitioner can be seen in the multiple terms related to this notion: “wounding healers” (Farber, 2017), “healing wounder” (Sloane, 2017), “the self-wounding healer” (Farber, 2017), “walking wounded” (Conti-O’Hare, 2002), “the impaired therapist” (Cain, 2000), and “unintegrated” (Richards, Holttum, & Springham, 2016) are a sampling of these terms. St. Arnaud (2017) writes that some therapists may come into practice because of “unaddressed psychological difficulties” (p.136) and that these may cause damage if not addressed. Sloane (2017), a practicing psychotherapist, conveys the ominous nature of past difficulties in his autobiographical essay writing, “one way or

another, we wind up repeatedly wounding and being wounded on the way toward healing ourselves and others” (p. 201).

All the above terms carry warning and stigma, potentially alienating those who desire to enter helping professions. The authors applying these labels caution against working with others when one is not “recovered” (White, 2000) and suggest that one must be healed in order to heal. This not only directly contradicts the mythos of the wounded healer (Chiron, the archetypal wounded healer, was never able to heal himself, yet became a renowned healer of others), it perpetuates a particularly romantic, and problematic, trope about The Healer. The “ideal” healer becomes the counsellor, therapist, CYCP who no longer has their own struggles, is completely “healthy” and totally self-actualized, an all-knowing self-reflexive exemplar of integrated wellness. Within the romantic notion of the ideal (wounded) healer is someone who has had challenges, “overcome” them, learned from them, and now helps others from that place of wisdom. Terms such as, “recovered people” (White, 2000), “experiential worker” (Phalen, 2009), “hidden talents” (Morgan & Lason 2015), “enlightened witness” (Farber, 2017), “integrated” practitioner (Richards et al., 2016) and arguably most problematically, “shaman” (Conti-O’Hare, 2002; Merchant, 2012; Faber, 2017), all perpetuate the romantic notion of the ideal healer. This healer trope presents a particular and limited understanding of wellness, one that says it may be okay to have been unwell, but now you must be healed, fixed, cured in order to work with others. Eli Clare (2017) identifies the many actions, from insidious to horrendous, that have been committed in an effort to “cure” the disabled. Clare (2017) points out that “...health is a mire. Today inside white Western medicine, health ranges from individual and communal body-mind comfort to profound social control” (p. 14). One wonders what forms of social control establish themselves in the ambivalent stance that CYC holds regarding practitioners with lived experience.

While I critique a romantic embracing of the wounded healer trope and the current enthrall of lived experience, I simultaneously see value in both constructions of one’s past. There is support for the idea that those who have gone through adversity can “grow” from their experiences. Farber (2017) discusses the increasing body of literature related to “post-traumatic growth” (PTG):

Over the last few decades, it has been found that that with the right circumstances and support, survivors can emerge from their

trauma stronger, more focused, and with a new and clear vision for the future. In fact, between half and two-thirds of trauma survivors report positive changes – far more than suffer from PTSD (p. 64, italics in original).

Important to note about PTG, is that the support need not be formal. Healing is not done only through psychotherapy, medication, or other forms of treatment. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) in a paper titled *Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence*, never once mention therapy or treatment. In the conclusion of the article, they write:

The phenomenon is complex and cannot easily be reduced to simply a coping mechanism, a cognitive distortion, psychological adjustment or well-being, or a host of apparently similar constructs. The outcomes of posttraumatic growth might be best considered as iterative, and it will take longitudinal work to trace the varied trajectories of the posttraumatic growth process. This process is likely to involve a powerful combination of demand for emotional relief and cognitive clarity, that is achieved through construction of higher order schemas that allow for appreciation of paradox. Metaphorical and narrative elements are likely to serve trauma survivors well as they take on a life that has become surprising, complicated beyond expectation, and painful (p.15).

In this description, we see, once again, a centering of self, and along with it, the notion that healing comes from within. This becomes important in the discussion of lived experience.

White (2000), in his two-part survey of wounded healers in addiction, claims that it is not the status of being wounded or not, in and of itself, that makes one effective as an addiction counsellor, but what one takes from the experience and how one uses it. For White (2000), it seems that the wound is not the litmus, but rather the who and the how. In this, we are returned to the idea of lived experience as something to use as a tool: “how you are; who you are; when you do; what you do” (Garfat and Fulcher, 2012, p.1). Inspired by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), perhaps, rather than reducing lived experience to instrumental applications, CYCPs can strive towards a “construction of higher order

schemas that allow for appreciation of paradox” (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, p. 15) within ourselves and those we work with. Instead of how, who, when and what, CYCPs can seek out “metaphorical and narrative elements”, as we live and work in lives that are “surprising, complicated beyond expectation, and painful” (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, p.15).

Conclusion

In reviewing the small selection of literature identified from CYC looking specifically at lived experience, there appear to be three main themes. The *use of experiences* towards influencing children youth and families, this can be thought of as an instrumental or operational application of lived experience. Writing about the *lived experiences of young people* and the importance of being present within their life space, this can be thought of as a relational understanding of lived experience. And finally, personal *narratives of practitioners* lived experiences, either (and at times both) as children themselves or as practitioners, this can be thought of as a reflexive writing of lived experience. Based upon the literature considered, the preceding categories are not discrete, and writing can exist within one, two, or all three. This can be seen, for example, in some of the discussions about self in CYC. It is not possible at this point to make any definitive claims about writing regarding lived experience in CYC literature, given the limited numbers of materials read and the searching criteria used to gather those materials. However, the initial review does point to areas for further inquiry. A larger sampling of literature within CYC looking at lived experience will need to be examined to see if these categories hold, are representative of the broader literature, and/or if there are more themes than this preliminary reading revealed.

There was a small sample of CYC literature explicitly addressing wounded healers used for this paper (it is worth noting, that a search of library databases and Google, do not reveal significantly more CYC specific writings on this topic). Notwithstanding the limited source material, it appears that those who are writing on the topic think that a consequential number of CYCPs could be considered wounded healers, or otherwise have "system involvement." Although, there is little more than anecdotal support for these claims in CYC. Given the paucity of research on this topic in CYC, there are many opportunities for further inquiry. Such as, what does lived experience do in Child and Youth Care? What phenomena exist behind or underneath lived experience, and what do those with such experiences make of them? What impact does lived experience have on

practitioners, those they work with, and colleagues. Is there any support for claims of efficacy regarding lived experience? If so, what makes one effective in their practice from lived experience? Do the four benefits of those who lived in residential placement helping others that Melkmen et al. (2015) identified, hold beyond their pool of respondents? Specifically, that it (1) offers a possibility to work through the past; (2) distracts people from their own problems; (3) enhances their sense of normality, and (4) enables them to stay connected with others?

Outside of CYC specific contexts, the two most common themes identified in mental health literature on the topic of wounded healers were: the reasons people with particular lived experiences choose to enter helping professions; and, the idea that practitioners with lived experience need to self-heal in order to heal others (Conchar & Repper, 2014). An example of this latter point is seen in claims that for people to “effectively” bring their lived experiences into their work, practitioners must first “deal” with their past. This, it is posited, is to avoid problems or issues from practitioners’ past negatively impacting their work or themselves. Throughout the literature discussed, there appears a fear that damage will be done by the practitioner unless they have “healed,” although how healing is to be assessed and by whom, is undefined.

Based on the literature reviewed, questions are also raised regarding the very notion of healing, perceptions of what healing means, and whether the concept might be misleading or even stigmatizing. Stigmatizing to practitioners with particular lived experiences as well as those seeking services, potentially resulting in negative impacts on practitioners, their work, or those they work with. Critiquing this discourse of healing leads one to ask what messages are being sent regarding wounds, wellness, healing, health, and, more broadly, disability. Recall the self-pathologizing language used by Tone (2016) and Chung (2017) in discussing their system involvement, and Clare’s (2017) pointing out that “health is a mire.” I wonder what it might do if we took Marshall and Thorn’s (2017) statement that “relational and strength-based CYC practice, with a focus on disability rights and diversity, is a genuine best practice for improving the lives of young people with disabilities” (p. 84) and considered it regarding CYCPs. I suggest Child and Youth Care could benefit from more discussion and theorizing related to notions of wellness, health, cure, disability and related topics, particularly as they are applied to the constructs of lived experience and wounded healer.

This paper has looked at a selection of literature related to practitioners who have been service recipients and are now working as service providers in areas related to their

lived experiences. While sufficient for a paper of this size, a significant amount of writing about this topic could not be included. Thus, as identified above, several areas need further examination before definitive claims can be made. In addition to the points already stated, it is clear there has been minimal theorizing, or formal inquiry, into the many topics related to lived experience in Child and Youth Care. Multiple questions have yet to be asked, let alone answered. This paper seeks to provide a way towards these questions and answers.

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Audio Drama Inquiry: A Telling Method of Research Wolfgang Vachon

(An extended version of a chapter for the book *Sonic Engagement: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Community Engaged Audio Practice* by S. Woodland and W. Vachon to be published in 2022.)

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Introduction

In this chapter I lay out the process of, and rationale for, using audio drama inquiry as the central method of my PhD, *Tuning into Child and Youth Care: An Arts-Based Audio-Drama Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners Who Have Lived in Residential Placement*. Throughout the chapter I present audio drama inquiry as an ethically engaged, community responsive, and aesthetically enticing approach. It is a unique form of research which is characterized by the following: exemplifies a methodical and theoretically-grounded approach to public knowledge generation, situates itself within existing scholarship, advances arguments through making knowledge claims, and meets well-established ethical standards and institutional regulations for conducting human research. I draw on research-based and applied

theatre, aesthetic theory, care ethics, and Mad studies, to present audio drama as a sonically dynamic way of conducting inquiry.

Child and youth care (CYC) is a practice-based field that supports children, youth, families, and communities through a 'developmental-ecological perspective [which] emphasizes the interaction between persons and the physical and social environments, including cultural and political settings' (naccw.org.za). Canada, South Africa, and the United Kingdom have the most developed CYC infrastructures including formal education at the diploma, Bachelor, Masters, and Doctoral level. However, with only one Doctoral and three Masters' programs in existence, CYC does not have a deep research literature. As such, many of the concepts and practices informing CYC are adapted from allied disciplines. With two of the three Masters programs opening in the past decade, there have been important discussions regarding which approaches to inquiry are suited to the field, the implications and impacts of different methodologies, and how these might be taken up by practitioners, students, and other scholars (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010; Vachon, 2021). One exciting, albeit contested, area of this discussion is the value of arts-based inquiry (ABI) in CYC.

Tuning into CYCⁱ intentionally situates itself at the centre of these methodology discussions by using ABI in the generation and dissemination of the study (Leavy, 2018), drawing on approaches to inquiry informed by research-based theatre (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) using methods drawn from ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2011), playbuilding (Norris, 2009), verbatim theatre (Salvatore, 2020) and applied theatre as research (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015). In addition to the above, I draw on ethics of care (Tronto, 2015), CYC scholarship (Gharabaghi & Charles, 2019), Mad Studies (LeFrançois et al., 2013) and considerations of aesthetics (Born et

al., 2017) to situate the study. *Tuning into CYC* is a collaborative CYC ABI developed with two cohorts of child and youth care practitioners *from care* (i.e., practitioners who previously resided in residential placement) resulting in two publicly available audio dramas. The first cohort collectively devised two scripts (only one of which, *ReFiled*, has been produced due to COVID restrictions) and the second cohort had conversations with me which were turned into a verbatim audio drama (*Hiring Care*). The verbatim audio drama was workshopped four times, the first three solicited input from other CYCPs living across Canada, through reflective listening panels; the fourth time with actors trained in verbatim performance.

Child and youth care practitioners from care (CYCPfC) have formal education in CYC and a history of living in a residential placement in a residential placement such as group homes, foster homes, semi-independent living, or related institutional arrangements. Placement criteria did not include detention facilities, hospitals, shelters, psychiatric institutions or related locations (although, several of the participants also had experiences living in one or more of these institutions). The study explores how being from care and working as a CYCP is understood, conceptualized, theorized, and performed by CYCPfC. The audio dramas' present the findings of the study, which have been fictionalized and turned into stories. Holstein and Gubrium (2012) write, "stories are discursive ways of doing or accomplishing something. The narrator or storyteller actively shapes or constructs narrative reality to achieve particular descriptive, rhetorical ends—be they personal myths or extraordinary events..."(p.7). Stories are a way that people make meaning of events in their lives. People (both individually and collectively) shape and construct their narrative reality, which leads to shaping their lives, our

lives - our reality. In creating our stories, we create ourselves. Through audio drama inquiry, creators have the opportunity to manifest what might be.

Audio Drama Inquiry

Audio drama is an emerging approach to qualitative inquiry with few examples and little methodological, theoretical, or practical writing about the form. In the process of trying to understand this nascent method, Sarah Woodland and I introduced the term *applied audio drama* and sought to map the contours of this approach. (Vachon & Woodland, 2021). As both of us work in applied theatre, we drew heavily on this literature to situate our audio drama practices. Applied theatre encompasses theatre creation with(in) community groups who may or may not have theatre experience. For example, a lot of Woodland's work is with incarcerated women (Woodland, 2020) and my own has frequently been with young people who have social service involvement (Vachon and McConnell, 2018). Such projects are generally created for people from, and interested in, those communities. We also drew on O'Connor and Anderson's (2015) conceptions of applied theatre as research (ATAR), which they frame as "an act of political and cultural resistance that creates through the fictional frame a set of propositions that are co-constructed, analyzed and then re-presented to communities as a method of creating new knowledge and forging social change" (p. 49).

This construction by O'Connor and Anderson aligned with our own work in applied audio drama, which we saw as "engaged with process as much as product. . . not limited to specific structures, lengths, or forms", "aesthetics [being] entwined with ethics and politics", and the work frequently containing "socio-cultural agendas and provocations" (Vachon & Woodland, 2021, p. 4). Both ATAR and applied audio drama have at their roots an engagement with

community, sees the process itself as a possible site of inquiry (MacNeill, 2018), and functions with a socio-political and critical theory analysis.

There is much I like about ATAR and using it as a frame to consider applied audio drama. However, a limitation with the term applied audio drama is its explicit ties to ATAR and applied theatre. While this can be useful to situate the method within the applied theatre scholarly discourse, it may not mean much to those who are not familiar with this sub-genre of theatre. The term applied may also be misleading to people working in qualitative inquiry or industry-based research. Applied also carries aspects of instrumentality. When something is applied, it is for “practical use” or within “functional contexts” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021a). This framing of something for functional or practical use risks reducing the perception of applied audio drama to a singular application which might impact the way people understand or engage with the process and resultant audio drama. To see all applied audio drama as practical removes the many possibilities existent through the work. Because of the above reasons, I use the term audio drama inquiry in this chapter.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary inquiry is “the action of seeking, esp. (now always) for truth, knowledge, or information concerning something; search, research, investigation, examination” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021b). In her introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Leavy (2018) recognizes the “essence of qualitative inquiry as a way of understanding, describing, explaining, unraveling, illuminating, chronicling, and documenting social life” (p.1). Audio drama inquiry lends itself particularly well to all of these elements. This is certainly not unique to audio drama; many forms of performance can do

this, which may be why performance as a mode of qualitative inquiry is an approach that is garnering a lot of attention at the moment. For Denzin and Lincoln (2018):

A performative project informed by research and inquiry, involves acting in the world so as to make it visible for social transformations. This is a postqualitative, post-research-inquiry-world. It is a world defined by risk taking, by textual experimentation, by ontologies of transformation, a world defined by acts of love, struggles, and resistance, a world shaped by dramatic radical acts of activism (p. 11).

In the above understandings of inquiry broadly, and qualitative inquiry specifically, audio drama inquiry comfortably resides. The form is particularly well suited towards seeking, revealing, illuminating, and transforming, given its ability to not only document and reflect but in its capacity to imagine and refract.

Soltani (2018) provides a definition of “audio-dramaturgy” which he sees as unique from other forms of dramaturgy, including that used for radio drama.

Audio-dramaturgy then, is the praxis that turns a fiction into a dramatic presentation in sonic form, to be experienced as the ‘here and now’ of a world by a listener: the practices and processes that construct and configure the sound structure, the technologies involved in its creation, aesthetic paradigms, hypotheses about the audience’s response, and so on (192).

Functioning within the here and now for the listener is an approach that ABI frequently draws on. In the opening sentence of the introduction to *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* Leavy (2018) wrote, “art, at its best, has the potential to be both immediate and lasting” (p. 3). This is in direct contrast to how research is often written about, for example, the American

Psychological Association's 7th edition of their publication manual instructed writers that the reporting of results must be written in the past tense (American Psychological Association, p. 118). This automatic archiving creates a distance in the person engaging with the research.

Audio drama inquiry brings the research experience into listeners' present life and invites them to engage by hearing *now*, often in first-person, thereby creating a form of intimacy and immediacy. Listening to audio drama inquiry recordings as a present tense experience is complicated by the recognition that what is being heard is not actually happening. It happened. And it is not actually me. It is another. Further, audio drama is fiction which both invites intimacy through the structures of storytelling and creates distance through the acceptance that 'this is not real'.

Listening is a verb, an active process that requires attention, negotiation, and integration into/with self in relationship to that which is being listened to. In discussing "world music" Roshanak Kheshti talked about the listening subject entering the "space/ time of *others*" (Brooks and Kheshti, 2011, p. 331, italics original). Given the troubled past of research, particularly its abuses of people (Smith, 2012), the idea of entering the space / time of others holds importance in audio drama inquiry, as well as all forms of qualitative inquiry. When listening to research as though being present (experiencing it as happening now), there are ethical and aesthetic implications which have the potential to simultaneously engage and 'implicate' the listener. This is a relevant, and evocative, shift for those who encounter the research. Audio drama inquiry is not only about what was, but about what is, how it is, and the potential of what might become.

Wood (2020) writes of "listening backward" as:

a mode of queer worldmaking across time and space. Breaking up the dichotomy of past/present . . . Imbued in listening backward, then, is an embrace of queer temporalities or a rejection of the linear, the static, the rhythms that ask us to adhere to hegemonic notions of scholarly objectivity and/or progress via the passage of time (p. 123).

In this glossing of listening backwards, Wood is considering historical recordings, and frames these as places of “queer sonic intimacies” when listened to across time, across race, and repetitively. Listening backwards is a listening that does not stop after a single encounter but rather encourages a relationship to develop between “the listening subject” (p. 112) and the recording. The notion of relational development through repetitive listening is something that those who work with voices in audio can relate to. In *Tuning into CYC*, I have listened repeatedly to both original interview recordings and actors performing those recordings. This has created a sense (albeit unidirectional) of intimacy and relationship between myself, the people I spoke with, the actor portraying these individuals, and provocatively the “character”. The last of which is all, and none, of the above simultaneously. In Wood’s work, I am drawn towards the worldmaking framing of this listening, rejection of the linear, and the intimacy that can occur in the listening. Given that I am not working with archival recordings, the historical elements and framing the listening as a movement towards the past, or backward, is less resonant for my own project. I prefer a present and future framing. When we listen, we listen now.

Research-based Theatre

Tuning into CYC draws upon several forms of theatre-inquiry. Saldaña (2011) writes that ethnotheatre:

...employs the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre or media production to mount for an audience a live or mediated performance event of research participants' experiences and/or researcher's interpretation of data. The goal is to investigate a particular facet of the human condition for purpose of adapting those observations and insights into a performance medium (pp.12-13).

Saldaña (2011) distinguishes ethnotheatre from ethnodrama, the latter of which he defines as, "a written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative... Simply put, this is dramatizing the data" (p.13). One of the limitations of this definition is the sense of ending the process with the performance. This tends to be a different conception than many applied theatre projects, which sees the performance as a waypoint leading to post-performance encounters. In my own project, there were several workshops / performances of *Hiring Care* as a way to continue developing and learning from the inquiry. Further, guides are being developed for listeners to use alongside the audio dramas, thus presenting the performances as a mid-point rather than an end.

Norris (2016) uses a process called "playbuilding" and sees "playbuilding as research" (p. 17) which can happen at any stage throughout the inquiry process. He shows examples of playbuilding used in the developing (gathering), mediating (analyzing), and communicating (disseminating) the materials (data). This he presents in contrast to some other forms of research-based theatre, such as ethnodrama "where data is traditionally collected, analyzed, and then disseminated through an 'alternative' form of representation. With Playbuilding, data is generated and interpreted in a different manner, and, at times, these three phases are simultaneous" (p. 22).

Verbatim theatre is described by Hammond and Steward (2008) as a technique rather than a form of theatre.

Verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts of an official enquiry. They are then edited, arranged or recontextualized to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used. (p. 9)

For Hammond and Steward (2008), verbatim is less a rigid set of rules to follow, and more of a variety of overlapping processes, tools, and approaches based on actual text towards creating a performance. When working in verbatim, one must think of the reasons for its use, its limits, intentions, and what it will do to and for the text, among other considerations (Salvatore and Vachon, in press). Researchers can draw on verbatim theatre as an additional method used to understand or analyze words and artifacts.

I did not intend to use verbatim theatre as part of this study, in fact, I made a conscious decision to stay away from this approach. But COVID lock down restrictions where I live, made collectively creating an audio drama from the transcripts very difficult, and recording together in a studio impossible. Consequently, I sought safe, legal, ethical, and affordable ways to develop audio dramas during these extreme situations. What became apparent is that research-based theatre (RbT) generally, and audio drama inquiry in particular affords valuable flexibility.

RbT might be thought of as an umbrella term encompassing all the above theatre-based inquiry processes. RbT “employ[s] creative means of data generation, analysis, and

dissemination with stakeholders, community members, and other researchers. . . [As a] means of knowledge translation that uses embodied approaches to address a broad range of critical social issues” (Belliveau et al. 2021, p. 141). The idea of embodied approaches becomes provocative when considering audio drama. Audio drama inquiry is a participatory or community engaged process, and thus works with embodied subjects throughout the creation, and understands the end listener as an embodied subject, yet may heard or envisioned as disembodied. It may be worth noting that when I had conversations with CYCPfC who resided outside of Toronto, these were most frequently held through telephone or Internet without a video component. Voice is without a doubt connected to the body, although in audio drama the listener may hear it as disconnected from a particular body and is thus able to project the voice onto bodies of their knowledge or imagination.

Drama, be it audio, video, or live performance exists predominantly in the realm of fiction. When working in fiction there is an invitation, “all *dramatised* stories – that is all stories clothed in *fiction* – are conversation starters” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2015, p. 280, italics in original). Rather than definitively answering questions, dramatised stories create space for dialogue and reveal opportunities to discover truths, through fiction, collaboratively. This participatory fictive aesthetic is a conscious resistance to traditional positivist claims of truth, objectivity, rationality and the implication that once the “ignorant understand”, change will happen (Rosiek, 2018). Trustworthiness in drama is less attuned to the factual accuracy of the story and more attuned to what the story does, why it resonates, how the source material is refracted through the creative processes and received by the listener, the multiple ways research collaborators,

creators, and listeners experience the story. Drama creates spaces for audiences to find their truths in the fiction.

The Contours of Audio Drama Inquiry

Audio drama inquiry is an aurally experienced research-based storytelling method which exists in the digital sonic realm informed by, yet distinct from, radio, theatre, video, or film. It is commonly situated within podcast culture, yet holds a unique and narrow place. As the label indicates, it is fictionalized, while drawing on elements of documentary, memoir, or interview-based productions. Indeed, in *Tuning into CYC* many of the tropes of these non-fiction styles are present in the fiction. Audio drama inquiry also holds similarities with (and owes some of its value to) radio drama, audio books, and audio-based “entertainment-education” campaigns (de Fossard 2005; Singhal et al. 2004). Like many forms of arts-based research, one might think of it as bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 11; Leavy, 2020, p. 9) a method constructed from multiple and diverse elements which together create something original. The constituent elements of audio drama inquiry employed for *Tuning into CYC* are discussed below.

Inquiry Led. Questions are central to all inquiry projects, and most studies begin with a set of well-honed research questions. These provide focus and represent the contours of what the researcher(s) will study. While all audio dramas develop through and are informed by questions asked during the script development, rehearsal, and recording process, not all audio dramas should be considered research studies. Audio drama inquiry has an explicit intention through the questions it is exploring and follows processes informed by established tenets of research—such as ethical protocols, being grounded in articulated theory, advancing knowledge claims, situated within a body of literature, using a methodical and public approach that is amenable to

scrutiny and critique. Like all research, the depth, shape, and specific process of study for each individual audio drama inquiry will shift from project to project. For *Tuning into CYC* we began by considering the question, ‘What does lived experience of residential care do in child and youth care?’

Community responsive. Audio drama inquiry is a dialogic process which creates opportunities for multiple perspectives and participants. The level of participation will shift from project to project and all involved must be cognizant of the expectations and limits of the participation. For example, distinctions can be made between community led, community engaged, community involvement, and community-member input. Audio drama inquiry has the potential to include people at all stages of the process including developing/collecting, mediating/analyzing, and communicating/disseminating materials. Each will depend on the on the desires, resources, and capacities of community members and researchers. Elements of all these positions were present in *Tuning into CYC*.

Audio. Audio drama lives in recorded audio and exists sonically. The value of sonic engagement will be apparent to most readers of this book. I came to audio through theatre and what I perceived as the benefits of this form over other forms of applied theatre as it relates to participatory research practices. These include its engaging and accessible nature, the potential for large numbers of audience members to experience with the production, the longevity of productions to exist on the web, its relatively low costs to produce, conceptions of sonic agency and the ability to resist coercive soundscapes, opportunities for imaginative intimacy, and the theoretical possibilities to explore ideas researched (Vachon and Woodland, 2021).

Truth through fiction. Audio drama inquiry breathes in the realm of fiction, while living in reality. Fiction allows emotional and intellectual distance, while simultaneously bringing the listener closer to the subject(s) investigated. Anyone who has done research has been faced with questions of what to include and what to omit. How to analyze the data and the tools used to do so. This is true whether working in qualitative or quantitative research. Different models and assumptions deliver different results. Nairn and Panelli (2009) claim “Academic writing, like ‘fiction’ is a construction of ‘reality,’” (p.97). Each develops narratives in order to present the truth of the story. Audio drama inquiry acknowledges this fictive construction and embraces it for what it can do.

Theoretically supported. *Tuning into CYC* is informed by the practices and ideas of RbT, CYC, care ethics, and Mad studies, the latter two of which will be discussed more below. In order to situate audio drama inquiry within scholarly literature one must be aware of and be able to articulate what theoretical lenses it draws upon. Arguably, all audio drama works with theory, but not all dramatists, dramaturges, actors, directors, and sound artists can identify the theory utilized, nor coherently articulate it. As this project is part of a doctoral program, the requirements for understanding and working with theory were higher than they might be if I was not being overseen by an academic institution, for example if all of the funding came from arts grants.

Aesthetics of inquiry. It is possible to dismiss aesthetics as irrelevant to inquiry; however, opening up inquiry to the scrutiny of aesthetics provides multiple benefits. This begins with recognizing that aesthetics are grounded in theory as much as subjective experience. In addition to notions of beauty, aesthetic considerations include form (Bourriaud, 2002), purpose

(Kant, 2007), context (Born et al., 2017), quality (Thompson, 2015), engagement (Berleant, 2016) and the principles that underlie these concepts (Vachon, 2021). Aesthetics are a useful guiding frame for anyone embarking on an inquiry process, be it arts-based or otherwise. Many academics strive towards beauty in their research and writing, if we accept beauty as ‘that quality of a person or thing which is highly pleasing or satisfying to the mind; moral or intellectual excellence’ (OED, 2021). The other elements of aesthetics are equally relevant: we have intention (purpose) when we engage in research; we seek to locate and respond to the unique context in which we investigate; we consider the quality of our work both in the sense of excellence and in the sense of its characteristics, conditions, and features; and there is a reciprocal or relational engagement to the work.

Ethically grounded. Audio drama inquiry is rooted in ethical principles and practices ethics as a generative *process* towards understanding ways of engaging and participating which honours all those who participate. I will discuss ethics, alongside aesthetics, more fully at the end of this chapter.

The method used in *Tuning into CYC*

Methodological choice for an inquiry depends on what is being studied, what the intentions of the study are, and the people engaged in the process. Inquiry is not static, and all elements may be required to adapt as situations change; this was certainly the case during *Tuning into CYC*. Factors such as lower than hoped initial participant numbers, COVID-19 restrictions, receiving funding, and logistical practicalities meant shifting plans multiple times and requesting several amendments from the institutional ethics review board. Fortunately, I began by exploring something that interested me and chose a method that resonated with who

I am. Philosophically, it was also important to work in a way that was congruent with CYC practice, pedagogy, writing, and inquiry. These included being relational in my inquiry (Bellefeuille and Ricks, 2010; Vachon, 2020); seeing development of community as an intention and result of research (Etmanski et al., 2014); drawing upon productive ethical principles whereby ethics are considered a means to create possibilities, not only, or primarily, about sanctions (Faulkner and Tallis, 2009); pleasure as a criterion in considering methodological choices and research participation (Foster, 2016); understanding inquiry as acts of care between people and other materials (Barad, 2003); operating from an awareness of decolonizing, anti-oppressive, and critical theory approaches (Amponsah, & Stephen, 2020; de Finney et al, 2020; Vachon, 2020) and drawing on the skills and knowledge of all people involved (Sweeney et al., 2009). By starting from these positions, I recognize that research is not a matter of description alone, it is the manifestation of matter, and CYC inquiry is “ontologically generative” (Rosiek, 2018, p. 637).

Participant Recruitment

The first audio drama, titled *ReFiled*, was collectively devised by a cohort of seven CYCPfC (participant researchers) and the second, *Hiring Care*, was based on recorded conversations with ten CYCPfC from five provinces across Canada. A third source of material included three “reflective panels” with 13 CYCPs who watched and then discussed a staged video reading of excerpts from *Hiring Care*.

For recruitment, I reached out through CYC related listservs, social media platforms, post-secondary institutions, agencies that work with people in the child welfare system, and people I knew who were CYCPfC or might know others who were. I also invited participant-researchers

to tell others that they knew about the project. I had seven people in total come to the initial recruitment workshops. Due to a lower than hoped for initial group, I amended my project and received permission from ethics to have recorded conversations with CYCPfC from across Canada.

Material Generation

Participant-Researcher Group processes.

Introductory and Script Building Workshops. There were two workshop formats implemented to generate materials with participant-researchers: two introductory recruitment workshops, and 12 script building workshops. The two introductory three-hour workshops were facilitated with CYCPfC who expressed interest in the project. These took place in March and May of 2019 and were an opportunity for people to participate in an arts-based data generating session allowing them to 1) contribute to the project; and 2) to experience what the multi-session audio drama inquiry process would be like. The initial workshops used audio, theatre, and poetry to generate materials.

After the initial workshops, we moved into the script development process, the generating, considering, and shaping of the empirical materials. There were 12 of these workshops each lasting three-hours; in total seven people participated. This ended up being a rotating group and by the end of the 12th session there were five core people who participated in most of the sessions. When I spoke with those who left about why they had stopped attending, one was due to distance (they had been doing a two-hour train trip for each workshop) and the second said they had too many other commitments. Between the recruitment workshops and the script development sessions nine people contributed to creating series one, *ReFiled*.

Over the course of 12 sessions, we developed two audio drama scripts. The first, *ReFiled*, follows Revel, a CYCPfC working in a group home who is required to support another staff, Patrick, after Patrick initiates a resident restraint. This causes an internal crisis which catalyzes Revel to reconsider their role as a CYCP. While reviewing the “Serious Occurrence Report” (SOR) submitted following the restraint, Revel see their own past SORs from when they were a resident in the same agency. This motivates them to retrieve their other child welfare and mental health files. The storyline comes out participant-researchers direct experiences as well as abstracted emotional states that they articulated. For example, scenes of climbing a giant filing cabinet or being shot at for trying to retrieve information about themselves are not recreations of events they lived, but rather, depictions of how some experienced the events they lived. The participant-researchers created the scenes to articulate a truth not being effectively communicated through the naturalistic scenes. There is a clear departure in these episodes from “lived experience” and a move towards emotional reality through the fictive construction.

The second script comprises a series of linked scenes around the themes of dogs, relationships, and care. The narrator is a talking dog who tells their life story, which mirrors some of the experiences of those in the group. Abuse, abandonment, living on their own under legal age, going into placement, and then dedicating one’s life to caring for others. The world of dogs was an unexpected theme for me and not an area I was remotely considering when I started this project. Yet, every person in the group embraced this development and it led to a fantastical near future dystopian world. Unfortunately, due to COVID restrictions this script has not yet been produced.

Generating materials.

We used a wide array of processes to generate and consider the materials during the workshops. These included, but were not limited to, sharing experiences, storytelling, improvisation, creating soundscapes, developing interview questions, tableau work, poetry, drawing, vocal explorations, diagramming ethics, constructing conceptual frameworks of the inquiry, and letter writing exercises, among others. As part of the creation process, I occasionally brought in outside materials to catalyze the generation of group material. I quickly learned that the group was primarily interested in working with their own experiences, rather than outside materials. One example of this was when I introduced transcripts from the conversations I had with other CYCPfC. As we were exploring themes of “disclosure” and “care” in workshop six, I thought it might be useful to broaden our material sources and bring in the transcripts on these topics from other people I had spoken with. After a short period of time reading and discussing the transcripts, they pivoted to speaking about their own experiences again and wanted to work with their stories rather than the transcripts. This made sense to me. After trying to work with the transcripts a few different ways with the group, I came to realise that using transcripts to glean relevant information is time consuming, not the most engaging of processes, and can limit people’s ability to share their own experiences. I did not bring in the transcripts again, although I did ask several more times if they were interested in using them, each time they declined. These transcripts became the material for the verbatim audio drama script called *Hiring Care* discussed below.

Considering Materials.

Norris (2016) used the term “mediation” (p.10) rather than analysis when referring to engaging with “data”. He does this in recognition that empirical materials are not static. For Norris (2016), “arts-based researchers construct meanings using words, images, gestures and sounds. . . Meaning is a co-existence of form and content. As each changes so does the meaning” (p.123). For Norris, there is a *mediation* as the “knower and the knowing change” (p.10). As the material continues to be mediated, the inquiry develops additional material (matter), the process becomes generative. I prefer the term “consideration” rather than mediation. Mediation carries with it connotations of intervention, arbitration, conflict, and conciliation. All processes that might have been experienced as oppressive to those who have lived in residential placement. Thus, I frame the “data analysis” as a consideration of materials gathered (stories, images, poems, audio recordings, transcripts, etcetera) which we explored through multiple arts practices.

Core to all the work is an ethico-aesthetic stance, which in the script development phase included a constant back and forth process between the group and myself. The group would improvise around themes, which I documented through notes, audio recordings, and some video recordings (the latter two of which were then transcribed). I used these materials to build scenes that were brought back to the group to read, consider, improvise on, and rework. In several instances participant-researchers would write text or scenes which we would then workshop and improvise around. These were often quite different in tone and style, and thus an important and meaningful contribution to the work (such as the scenes described above about being shot at or climbing giant filing cabinets). Other scenes were explicitly autobiographical which allowed people to have specific important elements or aspects of

themselves and their stories inserted into scripts, in their own words. After 12 workshops we had the basic shape of two scripts and we moved into the rehearsal phase.

Rehearsal.

The rehearsal phase was not focused on developing new content but rather, working with, refining, and exploring the content we had developed. I came to understand these as additional analysis sessions, to use ethnographer Amanda Coffey's (2018) framing of the term which "involves an ongoing dialogue with and between data and ideas" (p. 25). Scripts were acted out scene by scene with different people rotating through different characters. After each scene there would be a discussion to assess if it was reflecting what the group wanted to say, sometime we would do more improvisations, and then additional changes were made. I would then revise, rewrite, and return. This process went back and forth until we were all satisfied with the scripts. We did this three times over the fall of 2019. We completed the script for series one, called *ReFiled*, and had a 3rd draft of what we expected to be series two. The later series (the dog stories script) elicited more discussion and contrary positions than series one, so we decided to record *ReFiled* and to continue working on series two in the spring of 2020.

Audio-production.

Once we had completed *ReFiled* and cast the roles, we recorded the audio-drama. The cast was a mixture of participant-researchers who were part of the creative process as well as trained actors. Before recording each day, I led a warm up followed by run-throughs of the scenes. We then recorded, usually doing several takes where the actors had the scripts in front of them and then two to three takes "off book". We recorded in a closed makeshift studio as well as several different locations.

Conversations with CYCPfC

Recorded Conversations. Due to the lower than hoped for turnout of participants to the initial workshops (seven) and concerns about attrition, I expanded beyond workshop participants, and included conversations with CYCPfC from across the country. Drawing on the work of Doucet (2019) I use the term conversation rather than interview in recognition of how some people with child welfare involvement have negatively experienced interviews through their time in the system. I spoke with 10 people from five provinces across Canada. As the project was an audio drama inquiry, I made the decision to only record the audio and not videos of people. I gave people the option of using video or just audio in the recording, all but one person chose audio only. Everyone I had conversations with were offered compensation for their time, although not all accepted the compensation.

I wrote a verbatim script based on these conversations. The script is centered around an idea stated by one of the conversationalists that they would like to write a booklet for organizations who want to hire people from child welfare to work in their organizations. This is the frame used in the script to bring a collection of seven CYCPfC together to have conversations about being from care and working in CYC. Over seven episodes they discuss various topics including stigma, care, empathy, systemic barriers, cultural violence, racism, education, and the benefits of their lived experiences in CYC work, among other topics related to having placement experience.

Working with transcripts can be done in many different ways, the most common of which are various forms of coding, used to identify specific themes (Saldaña, 2016). In consultation with my PhD supervisor, I decided not to approach the analysis through a traditional line-by-line

coding process. Rather, I approached it as an artist-researcher, crafting the verbatim script through finding narrative lines, looking for relationships (of people, ideas, words, including conflicts within those relationships), and listening for moments of engagement. It was a personal, subjective, and biased process, rife with my own prejudices and agenda. In this approach I drew on Leavy's (2018) arts-based data analysis procedures which includes "garnering feedback from peers", "having an internal dialogue", and "using theory and or literature well" (pp. 578-9). When listening to and transcribing the conversations (aided by otter.ai, a transcription software program), and then re-reading the transcripts, I paid attention to ideas that were similar and distinct from the collectively created script developed previously. I looked for possible narrative lines considering the elements of aesthetics identified above, including form, purpose, context, quality, and engagement. Informed by theoretical and empirical literature, I tuned into topics that were present or absent in the literature (theories of care, self-identity, notions of benefits and limitations of lived experience, among others). I placed conversationalists into dialogue with each other, seeing what was revealed when I had the characters speak to one another. I sought out the sonic possibilities, verbal textures, and what Camp (2017) calls "infrasounds", those sounds that "like a hum, resonates in and as vibration" (p. 7). Working this way was generative, expansive, rigorous and creatively satisfying. Once I had a functioning draft, I then cast it, workshopped it, heard it, re-cast it, and revised it, making further adjustments throughout the rehearsal, recording, and editing process.

Working without an established coding process was much more challenging than I anticipated. There is comfort as a researcher in having a step-by-step set of tools to follow from which one can expect particular outcomes. Outcomes that are accepted, recognized, and that

fall within traditional academic norms that will not be challenged because they are familiar to academic audiences, despite their limitations. Qualitative inquiry has been in a continuous process of unsettling research norms (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), and more recently in unsettling settler frames (Huaman and Martin, 2020). Drawing on ethics of care, Mad studies, and CYC as orienting epistemologies, I sought to be relational, ethical, responsive, care-filled, aesthetically engaging, and always considered what I wanted to achieve through the inquiry. To this end, between the two cohorts of CYCPfC, multiple, and cohort specific ways were developed to realize these intentions. With the collectively devised scripts, ethical guidelines were created with the group, the development and analysis of materials was done alongside the people whose experiences were being studied, and multiple opportunities were created to add, alter, or withdraw materials. With the verbatim cohort, transcripts and the audio recording were sent to conversationalists to verify, they were invited to remove anything that they did not want used in the project, were offered drafts of the script, invited to workshops/readings of the script and were asked for feedback (in group, one-on-one, and/or written). With both groups people were compensated for their time; professional artists, editors, and sound designers were hired; and regarding the notion of community, I have developed or enhanced ongoing relationships with many of the people involved in the project, and several of them with each other.

Reflective Listening Panels. I drew on the idea of “reflective panels” (Fenge & Jones, 2012) to understand and interpret some of the material generated for *Hiring Care*. Reflective listening panels were made up of multiple stakeholders coming together to listen to selections of the material generated (one hour) and then have a facilitated conversation after the reading (one

hour). Panels were an opportunity to receive input from CYCPs about the verbatim script. The panels were comprised of 13 people from CYC. I sought a range of participants regarding geography, type of workplace, race, and gender. Seven were new to the project (all CYCPs from different areas of the country), three were people that I had conversations with and that were represented in the script (all people I had conversations with were invited, but only three came to the actual reading and workshop), and four were workshop participants who had participated in developing the first two scripts (one participated in both the workshops and the conversations). Panel participants watched either a live reading of the script (the initial workshop) or a recording of the reading. Conversationists were invited to watch the video in advance so that they had time to reflect and take care of themselves in case any difficult emotions came up. I also offered to meet with them individually to discuss anything they wanted; two of the three watched in advance, and none decided to speak with me one-on-one. I informed people who were conversationists or were part of the 1st script building process that I would not identify if they were part of the process, and they could decide themselves if they wanted to let people know. Some did and some did not share this information.

Based on the feedback from the reflective panels I reworked the script, hired a dramaturge to work on the script with me, and then did a workshop through New York University's Verbatim Performance Lab with actors, academics, and theatre artists who have experience in verbatim theatre. I was particularly interested in hearing how the script flowed from an aesthetic perspective (as opposed to a content perspective), and insight into how the piece landed outside of a CYC context. The consensus was that the piece was relevant and engaging

for those outside of CYC, that it held up as a viable audio drama, and was mostly ready for production.

Casting. I made the decision to work exclusively with trained actors for the verbatim script (*Hiring Care*). This was based on a combination of aesthetic and ethical choices. Verbatim performance requires particular skills and approaches unique to the process (Hammond and Stewart, 2008; Saldaña, 2011; Salvatore 2020, Vachon et al, 2019). Not all actors possess these skills, let alone people without theatre training. Unlike the devised audio drama script (*ReFiled*), which took place in multiple physical locations, *Hiring Care* is set as a series of telephone and video conferencing conversations (which presents a limited sonic world), thus, the ability of the actors to engage the audience becomes paramount.

I made several choices in hiring, such as ensuring that actors mostly aligned in race, creed, age, and gender with their characters. I made a couple of choices regarding gender that went outside of casting alignment. Three characters were composite characters, I made one of these characters males, although one of the conversationalists was female. I also cast one of the female parts with a male actor. This was not my original intention. I had several people read the part but they were not working for me as a director. At the Verbatim Performance Lab reading, the organizer cast a male for one of the female roles. I, along with the sound engineer and dramaturge were all impressed with his reading and after discussing it we decided to offer him the part. The character is a First Nations woman and he is a First Nations man (there is another First Nations female character who is played by a First Nations woman). This casting also brought more range to the vocal timbre of the performance. While the actor is male, the character remained female.

Rehearsing and recording. Some of the people I had conversations with did not want their identity to be known, while others did and disclosed their identities to other people (in the reflective panels for example). Some verbatim theatre strives to create a faithful exactness in the representations (Hammond and Stewart, 2008) what Joe Salvatore (Salvatore, 2020) calls “tight verbatim”. Because of anonymity factors I was not interested in utilizing this approach. I invited actors to bring themselves, their perspectives, histories, and experiences to the character. This was done as a way to create distance from the conversationalist, what I thought it could do aesthetically, and my perception of what would be most effective though audio drama.

From an ethical perspective I continue to struggle with this choice. How might it negate the experience of the conversationalists? If people do not have placement experience, have not worked in CYC, live in a different country than where the study took place, how does that change the material presented? Am I then presenting a distortion of experience? I think there is validity to all of these questions and I still struggle with the answers to them. I think it also allowed for different readings and understandings of the text.

It is common for researchers to analyze text alone, particularly at the Doctoral level. Their analysis will be informed by their experience, onto-epistemological lenses, social-locations, training, history, and inquiry agenda or purpose. By inviting the actors to contribute their experience, onto-epistemological lenses, social-locations, training, and history, I invited in different readings of the text. These readings are heard in the performances and added insights into the transcript text. This approach also aligned with the relational, community oriented, and intersectional principles informing the inquiry. It is not unusual when an inquiry process is

collaborative that multiple people will analyze the materials looking for commonalities and unique understandings. These can take on many different iterations, such as “codes” in the case of many qualitative inquiry processes (Saldaña, 2016), or themes and images in a Forum Theatre context (Boal, 1992), to provide just two examples. Regardless of the intention, there is a coming together in recognition that each person brings a different understanding to the materials. The readings and perspectives provided by Indigenous, racialized, and female actors went beyond my understanding of the characters. They brought perceptions that I had not considered, such as what might be behind a seven-second silence after a question from a white man to a woman of colour about race; such as how lines that I glanced over might be coded language about racism; about what might not be being said; and, about how my own biases might be showing up in the script. I also think that this approach to working with verbatim text engages the actor in a way that goes beyond the dismissive moniker of “talent” and actually honours their wisdom.

Aesthetics of Ethics

Aesthetics has long been a central concern in discussions of arts-based research (Cole and Knowles, 2008; Leavy, 2018; Leggo, 2008; O’Connor and Anderson, 2015; Pariser, 2009; Saldaña, 2011). Inextricable from aesthetics when doing ATAR, research-based theatre, audio drama inquiry, or any form of arts-based research is ethics. For *Tuning into CYC*, I considered aesthetics through conceptions of beauty, form, context, purpose, quality, and engagement; and ethics through notions of care, community, relationality, and generativity. These elements all overlap and each inform the other; indeed, many if not all of the just mentioned criteria for aesthetics could readily apply to ethics, and vice-versa. For the remainder of this chapter, based

on my experience with *Tuning into CYC*, I will consider what might constitute an aesthetics of ethics when working in community engaged audio drama inquiry.

Aesthetic discussions in ABI risk a reductionist collapse into whether or not the *art* or *research* is subjectively “good”. The separation into two categories (art and research) is a distinction made by critics and creators alike, revealing, perhaps an unwillingness to comprehend them as a whole. The notion of good, while useful if tied to specific criteria, may become shorthand for a personal affective response, and consequently fail to grapple with the multiple contextualizing components that constitute such aesthetic pronouncements. Leavy (2018) suggests evaluators of arts-based research ask, “‘Is it *art*?’ (Saldaña, 2011, p. 203) Is it good art? Are you moved by it? Are you engaged by it?” (p. 582, italics in original). These are generative affective prompts; however, as Leavy shows through providing multiple additional criteria for which to evaluate arts-based research, ABI attempt to achieve more than an affective response and simple reductions to notions of good, neglect to understand the complexity of the endeavour.

Pariser (2009) in a much-referenced critique, identified four “critical challenges” of arts-based research:

- a) arts-based research is undertheorized, naïve, and narcissistic; b) arts-based research is neither good research nor good art; c) arts-based researchers do not make enough connections with the pure disciplines; d) arts-based researchers do not adequately communicate their research results. (p. 9)

Leggo (2008) pre-dates Pariser’s publication (but not the public conversation) by arguing the question is not, “is this a good poem?” but rather “what is a poem good for?” (p. 7). Goodness

or utility of art is a direct challenge to Kantian notions of beautiful objects being purposive without having a purpose. Kant's idea of aesthetic "purposiveness" is that beautiful objects should affect us as if they did have a purpose, yet no purpose should, or indeed can, be found (Kant, 2007). For Kant, to ask what is it good for, negates the object from being considered as holding aesthetic merit. The very opposite may be said of inquiry. Considering purpose, while a direct challenge to Kant's (2007) notion of aesthetic purposiveness is an essential question for community-engaged arts-based inquiry (ABI). Understanding aesthetic purpose when working with/in community recognizes what Berleant (2016) calls aesthetic engagement, the shift away from art as object to art as experience. By neglecting aesthetic engagement, neglecting to ask what is the experience of all parties involved and what is the ABI "good for", we risk removing the ethical from the aesthetic.

Born, Lewis, and Straw (2017) wrote that social aesthetics hold an awareness of the central tenets of aesthetics as well as a critique of those very notions. Social aesthetics recognizes that aesthetics are socially constructed and imbued with all the contextualizing factors that make-up culture. Aesthetics, according to Born et al. (2017), are not objective, neutral, or disinterested—they have a purpose. The purpose is tied to the value that the community places on the object under consideration, "a social aesthetic argues for, and investigates the details of, the many ways in which our interactions with art participate in or serve an array of political orientations and social and cultural processes" (p. 3). This reaches into the heart of ethico-aesthetic sonic engagements with(in) communities. ABI, and by extension audio drama inquiry, must grapple with the aesthetics of ethics. Where does the "good" exist, and who determines this?

The obvious answer to the above question is: the community impacted, and (problematically at times) those impacting the community, in the case of audio drama inquiry-- researchers and artists. Here we might think of Thompson's (2015) call to an aesthetics of care, recognizing that "art making takes place in a series of relational acts, some more explicit and intentional than others" (p. 436). Considering how care is enacted through aesthetic decisions is a sharp turn away from purposelessness, re-framing the notion of "good art". *Tuning into CYC* was a project that sought multiple avenues for participant and co-researcher involvement, including in the realms of aesthetics, ethics, and structure. Coming from a field that places "care" within its very name (CYC), holds relational practice as a defining element, and doing research through an arts-based approach on an industry that also borrows the care nomenclature, considering aesthetics of care and relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) makes sense. This means being explicit in acts of relational inquiry with a "focus upon how the sensory and affective are realised in human relations fostered in art projects" (Thompson, 2015, p. 436). Concretely, for *Tuning into CYC*, this involved developing ethical protocols, sharing experiences, generating materials, analyzing materials, writing content, discussing what was included and what was not, performing, presenting, and co-authoring publications. The relationship does not end when the workshop, performance, or funding ends. Such an approach also means recognizing the multiple skills, experiences, and identities each carries into the inquiry.

For *Tuning into CYC*, the essential "dual-identity" at the heart of the dissertation project are CYCPs who have residential placement experience. In trying to understand this dynamic, I read mental health literature focusing on people with psychiatric hospitalization experience. This led me to Mad studies literature (LeFrançois et al., 2013; Voronka, 2016) and studying residential

experience through a “system user/survivor” lens (Sweeney et al., 2009). While not all CYCPfC involved in the project claimed such identities (“survivor”, “system user”, “from care”) or were even public about their care experiences, this literature was instrumental in developing ethical approaches for *Tuning into CYC*. When considering community engaged practices, Mad studies and system user/survivor research discourse has much to offer qualitative researchers and artists who work in communities. This body of work begins with a stance recognizing user/survivors’ “first-hand experience as a source of knowledge...[with] value and integrity...[and] as a unique source of understanding” (Beresford & Rose, 2009, p. 13).

There is a distinction made in the literature between “user-led research” and “user-involvement” within research. Sweeney (2009) cites evidence indicating user-led research is perceived more positively by “users” themselves, than user-involvement with, “the latter potentially creating tokenism and marginalisation” (p. 30). Sweeney also recognizes institutional, funding, skills, and other barriers that exist which may limit or prevent user-led projects. Thus, she suggests considering user-led and user-involvement along a continuum with “three distinct but continuous categories: *control*, *collaboration* and *consultation*” (Sweeney, 2009, p. 30, italics in original). This trifecta may be a useful frame for both “data” contexts, as well as sonic arts-practice contexts, with co-researchers contributing along a continuum from high (control) to low (consultation) in regards to both material development and art creation. Participation levels can be determined by community members availability, interest, and skills, recognizing that it is potentially damaging to try and “force” community members to do things that they have no desire or capacity to do.

Research done by Faulkner looked at “what principles and practices those of us involved in doing survivor research have developed” (Faulkner and Tallis, 2009, p. 54). From her study she identified ethical principles to consider when doing user/survivor research; I present these here augmented by interpretations from Sweeney (2009).

- *Clarity and transparency* with all parties involved, including protocols for informed consent and confidentiality.
- *Respect* for participants’ views, ensuring views are “heard,” and flexibility regarding people’s needs to take breaks or leave.
- *Equal opportunity*, including for diverse and minoritized populations, and adequate funding to support these opportunities.
- *Commitment to change*, doing research that leads to change, including implementation of the findings.
- *Empowerment*, shown by challenging stigma, fostering full participation, scaffolding participation to peoples’ skills while teaching more if required or desired, support and supervision for all involved in the project, and ensuring funding to pay for these empowerment protocols.
- *Identity*, with discussions regarding shared identities.
- *Theoretical approach*, including transparency revealing, and discussion regarding, the theories informing research.
- *Accountability* with research participants, the wider society, and other people as required.

Notable in these principles are their productive, rather than restrictive, nature. Meaning, they are structured to create opportunities and possibilities, as opposed to prohibitions. Thinking of ethics as generative territory works to resist bordering ideas which inform many discussions of ethics. While in each, considerations to do no harm exist, in the former this is done by considering how ethics can be a place of growth and possibility. There is a tendency to situate ethics as actions to be avoided rather than opportunities to be fostered. Part of this framing, no doubt, has to do with the differences between “ethical practices” and “ethical reviews” (Faulkner and Tallis, 2009). While review protocol must be adhered to, generative practices can also be included in research design. For *Tuning into CYC* I met the institutional ethics protocol, during which I described the rationale for community members to contribute to ethical considerations. This resulted in multiple generative ethical discussions with those who partook in the project and informed the practices for how we worked together. In a literal form of aesthetic-ethics, during the script building process we created visual representations of how we were going to engage ethically. These images were open to adaptation as the people changed and the project developed.

Conclusion

Audio drama inquiry has the potential to be an ethical, aesthetic, responsive, and community engaged process to generate, analyze, and disseminate research. As an emerging form it will be developed over the coming years by those who partake, theorize, and listen to the results. Undertaking it as a method of inquiry requires understanding the multiple shifting ways that information can be studied and disseminated while adhering to a process rooted in

theory, ethics, and oversight, whose aims include advancing knowledge through aesthetic engagement.

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ⁱ To hear the first series of audio dramas, visit www.ReFiled.ca, to hear the 2nd series and read additional publications related to the project, visit www.tuningIntoCYC.org

The Cost is Unacceptable: Excerpts of an Arts-Based Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners from Care

Wolfgang Vachon

Introduction

Professional helping fields, such as child and youth care, social work, mental health services, addiction, etc., have developed from multiple entwined, and at times, oppositional ideologies. These have included approaches informed by moral rectitude (Charles, 2015), mutual support (White, 2000), benevolent violence (Chapman and Withers, 2019), care ethics (White, in press), eugenics (Clare, 2017), individual emancipation (LeFrançois et al., 2013), colonialism (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), cultural resistance (Lappas, 2021), and white supremacy (Amponsah and Stephen, 2020) among others. These contrasting orientations have frequently come into conflict and attempts at harmonizing the antagonistic agendas have resulted in multiple intentional and unintentional consequences. Some of these have been positively transformative, others morbidly, if not mortally, harmful. Over the past couple of decades, CYC has begun to look critically at how we are implicated into these histories, how they have informed (and continue to inform) the work we do, and the implications of these lineages for our understanding of what CYC is as a field (Vachon and Walker, 2021). Concurrently, although not necessarily in direct response to this tangled history, CYC and allied occupations have seen multiple initiatives towards regulation,

professionalization, credentialization, evidence-based practices, and related ideologies (Fusco, 2012). More recently, there have been discussions, publications, conference presentations, and initiatives towards critically reflecting and analyzing our history, claiming identities within CYC that have not always been recognized or acknowledged, the development of affinity groups, an active call for political engagement of practitioners, revamping of college and university curricula, and a re-reading (and at times a re-writing) of some of the canonical literature.

One group that traverses many of these positions, a group that has been largely unheard from until recently, are Child and Youth Care practitioners “from care” (CYCPfC, although the notion of “care” is contentious and contested within this group). These are practitioners who have child welfare, child protection, residential placement, or related experiences and now work in CYC. Drawing on the knowledge and perspective of this unique demographic provides an opportunity for all CYCPs to consider the work we do, how we do that work, and to confront embodied impacts of the previously identified entangled agendas.

Tuning into Child and Youth Care: An Audio Drama Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners Who Have lived in Residential Placement, is a doctoral research project done with CYCPfC about their experiences as students and practitioners. As indicated by the title, the study uses an arts-based approach, specifically a method called audio drama inquiry. Arts-based research (ABR) is defined by Patricia Leavy (2018) as:

a transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that combines the tenets of the creative arts in research contexts ... ABR practices [are] methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during any or all phases of research, including problem generation, data or content generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation. ... This process of inquiry therefore involves researchers engaging in art-making as a way of knowing (Leavy, 2018, p. 4).

ABR is an approach that is ideally suited to CYC, in that it is relational, ethical, participatory, enjoyable, responsive to the skills, interests, and capacities of all research-collaborators, provides wide opportunities for dissemination, and may be less intimidating than other forms of research (Vachon, 2020a). *Tuning into CYC* worked within an emerging method of ABR called audio drama inquiry, which draws on applied theatre as research, ethno-theatre, podcasting, sonic agency, sound studies, and audio drama to “explore ideas of truth and resonance at the interface between art, research, education and social justice” (Vachon and Woodland, 2021, p. 1).

A challenge with ABR, in terms of academia, is that it rarely fits within the traditional parameters of scholarly literature. While ABR can lead to wide distribution across diverse communities outside of the academy, one rarely sees examples of it in peer-reviewed publications. One consequence of this is that emerging researchers (such as students, new faculty, or CYCPs in the workplace) may not be exposed to these approaches and thus not know that ABR exists as a methodological option. Further, because of this publication paucity, ABR can be perceived by fellow academics as illegitimate research, ill-suited for serious scholars, not clear, too hard to understand, not rigorous, or simply dismissed as “not good” (Pariser, 2009), and thus not an approach worth supporting or supervising. Because of all these factors, ABR remains contested within academia, including some sectors of CYC. For CYC students interested in this methodology their ability to pursue ABR is limited due to the lack of faculty qualified to supervise ABR in CYC programs, further leading to its marginal and underdeveloped status.

Conversations about what is and is not legitimate research in CYC are not new (nor are these conversations bad to have). Over the years there have been debates about the appropriateness and efficaciousness of evidence-based practices (Stuart et al., 2011), the value of transdisciplinary approaches (Land et al., 2018), CYC “authenticity” (Loiselle et al., 2012), ways of including children in research (Johannisen, et al., 2019), and the notion of a relational CYC approach (Bellefeuille, and Ricks, 2010), among other discussion topics (Stuart, 2013). While ABR arguments may only be the latest entry into the debates regarding acceptable CYC research, it does remind the reader of the conflicting founding paradigms introduced at the beginning of this paper.

While multiple examples of ABR relevant to CYC does exist, such as by and with people from the child welfare system (see [here](#) and [here](#)), people involved in the shelter system (see <https://transitioninghomepodcast.podbean.com/> and <http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Long-Way-To-Go.pdf>), young people navigating COVID-19 (<https://www.childart.ca/art-work>), Indigenous perspectives on gender-based violence (<https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/sistersrising/>), and a vast array of other topics, few emerging, or even established, scholars ever see this work.

It is useful for CYCPs – including researchers, educators, students, and other practitioners to ask how well CYC and those we work with have been served by traditional forms of research, and if CYC might benefit from developing a discipline attuned research paradigm. It is with the braided realities of historical legacies infusing CYC, the experiences of CYCPc, and the knowledge and acceptance of ABR within CYC that I write this piece, intending through doing so, to engage all these elements.

Tuning into CYCPc

The findings from *Tuning into CYC* are found within the audio dramas *ReFiled* and *Hiring Care*. To listen to the full audio dramas created as part of this inquiry please visit¹ www.ReFiled.ca. Unlike much research where each finding is named (or coded), explained, quotes shown to evidence the claims, and then a discussion is written arguing the opinions of the primary investigator(s), audio drama inquiry invites non-traditional ways of engaging with the findings. For this sonic dissertation the listener is asked to hear the words spoken, consider how they are edited, listen for what the stories reveal, and undertake their own subjective analysis emanating from their unique positionality. Each listener will hear differently the vast array of topics addressed in the audio dramas, such as stigma, trauma, healing, self-identity, anxiety, boundaries, racism, benefits and

¹ At the time of this writing, only *ReFiled*, which is season one of *Tuning Into CYC* is available. *ReFiled* is a collectively devised audio drama inquiry about a CYCPc, named Revel, who is involved in the restraint of a young person. Partaking in this restraint causes a personal & political rupture within them. This leads Revel to go and look at their own files stored in the same agency they work for. Season two, *Hiring Care*, is scheduled to be released in the fall of 2021, coinciding with when this issue is launched.

limitations of lived experience, readiness to work, doubt, disclosure, systemic barriers, safety, and care.

When I listen to *ReFiled* and *Hiring Care*, one of the (many) ways that I hear the audio dramas is through my knowledge of the “lived experience” literature. What becomes apparent to me is that CYCPfC perspectives are congruent with findings from allied fields (e.g., social work, mental health, and nursing, see Vachon, 2020b) such as identification with those they work with, role-modeling for young people, and their residential placement experience aiding in developing relationships with children and youth. The perception of some CYCPfC is that their lived experience leads to increased empathy with young people, an embodied understanding of young peoples’ situations, greater awareness of how systems work, and high motivations to initiate change regarding micro and macro systems. Along with these perceived benefits, there is an articulation of hazards and challenges related to their personal histories, the institutions in which they work(ed), and the CYC field more broadly.

Hiring Care

The remainder of this article is a script excerpt from *Hiring Care*, season two of *Tuning Into CYC*. *Hiring Care* is a verbatim audio drama based on conversations between myself and 10 CYCPfC. The conversations were conducted and transcribed in the summer of 2019. The script was written in the summer/fall of 2020. A reflective “listening panel” (Fenge and Jones, 2012) was held in the fall of 2020 with 13 CYCPs from across the country to gather responses to what was in the script, assess its relevance to a CYC audience, and to gain feedback on their emotional and cognitive reactions (for more about the process see Vachon, in press or visit www.TuningIntoCYC.org). Most of the script is verbatim, taken directly from what people said in the conversations we had. After transcribing, listening (and re-listening), and reading (and re-reading) I arranged the conversation texts into a structure whereby conversationalists were put into relationships with each other (even though none of the conversationalists actually spoke to each other). I have made composite characters of several people reducing the cast size to seven.

Hiring Care is constructed as a conversation between a group of seven CYCPfC who are meeting to talk about creating a way to support agencies who want to hire practitioners with child welfare experience. This construct came out of a quote from Charlotte² one of the CYCPfC I spoke with.

I think
what I would love,
and I actually had, like,
um
explored this opportunity with a couple of
youth in care, youth from care advocates that um
I spend time with sometimes.
Umm
is we almost like wanted to create a booklet about how to support someone with lived experience
in care in your organization.
Who works for you
ummm,
and at the same time {2 second pause}
still hold people accountable for
um
working on themselves?
I think it's hard
to hold space
for people with lived experience in care.
Um and I think people get nervous about it, ah nervous about triggering them or nervous about
kind of doing the wrong thing.

² All names are pseudonyms chosen by the people I had conversations with.

Script structure

The script is in a format that may be difficult to read in parts, it has several unique features not common to audio drama scripts or academic papers. I created these elements to track what I was doing to the words said by those I had conversations with. The formatting was initially developed for my own use. As I started to workshop *Hiring Care* (bringing in actors, doing readings, performing for selected audiences, soliciting feedback, etc.) I shared the syntactically inscribed script with the actors, the conversationalist who said the original words, and others who work in research-based theatre. Many people commented on how this way of writing the text brought awareness to research practices, including how researchers use, edit, manipulate, and contextualize material developed during the inquiry process. Further, some actors found the structure helpful in preparing and performing the roles (it must also be said, that some actors quite disliked it, and several removed the formatting when recording). Researchers, by necessity, make multiple decisions on how to best represent vast amounts of material (data) in a concise, relevant, and meaningful way. However, readers of research are not always able to see these constructions. By showing how I worked with the text, I hope to bring some transparency regarding my own process.

Here is a legend for the scored (Salvatore, 2020) text:

- Text that is crossed out and reduced to a smaller font: i.e. “...~~I~~ say” is part of the verbatim text but is not said by the character.
- Verbatim text that has been omitted by me while the character is speaking but is not crossed out is indicated by “[...]”. This is done for a variety of reasons but most importantly for confidentiality.
- Things in brackets: i.e. “[Yeah, and]” is said by the character. This is text that I have added and is not part of the original transcripts.
- If there are ellipsis not bracketed, there was a pause by the person during the original conversation i.e. “...”.
- Items italicised within parentheses are notes to the actor: “(Surprised)” or technical notes written by me.

- Items in {} are reactions or notes from the original transcript, i.e. “[laughter]”.
- Text that has a time stamp next to it is original verbatim. The time stamp is where that line was said in the original interview.
- Text that does not have a time stamp has been written by me.
- When you see the same character having multiple time stamps one right after another, it means I have removed my (Wolfgang’s) text/responses.

Characters

Three of the characters, “B”, “Ellisha”, and “Terri” are composites, meaning two people I spoke with have been combined into a single character.

All the names are pseudonyms, chosen by the original person I spoke with.

B

B is a white male in his 20s from the east coast of Canada. B is a composite character of two different people I spoke with.

Charlie

Charlie is a First nations woman in her late 40s currently living in the west coast but born in the east. She is based on a single person I spoke with.

Charlotte

Charlotte is a white female in her mid 20s from the west coast. She is based on a single person I spoke with.

Chelsea

Chelsea is a First Nations woman in her late 20s from the western provinces. She is based on a single person I spoke with.

Ellisha

Ellisha is a white Jewish woman in her mid-30s living in central Canada. She is a composite character of two different people I spoke with.

Leela

Leela is an Indo-Caribbean woman in her mid-20s living in central Canada. She is based on a single person I spoke with.

Terri

Terri is a white woman in late 50s from central Canada now living in the Atlantic provinces. She is a composite character of two different people I spoke with.

Scene context

The scene below is episode five of seven. The scene takes place on a video conferencing call with seven people present. After a previous conversation, where five of the six CYCPfC were white, Terri takes it upon herself to have a conversation with Leela, the one person of colour present. The awkward and problematic conversation is Terri's attempt to address topics related to representation, diversity, and "the difficulty in recruiting Indigenous, Black and other CYCPfC of colour". Following the scene between Leela and Terri, we are introduced to two new characters, Charlie and Chelsea, both indigenous women. The excerpt you are about to read, picks up after introductions of all the characters have been made.

Episode 5, Scene 1: The Cost is Unacceptable

Terri: Okay, um, yeah, so, ahhh where to begin. Um, so, I was thinking, we talked a little about this last time, but since we have some new people here, I'm wondering if we might start with some of the benefits of being from and working in care. Charlie?

Charlie: (Short pause) I have to right, otherwise I'd give up, right? Yeah, I mean, like, there's layers [unclear, maybe "I guess" or "of depths" or "of deaths"]. So one, one is like, there's spider roofing. Is like, using my [unclear maybe "wizards" or "resources"] where I really was just on a path to self destruction? [Um ...] Like, you know, it, [the system] on an individual level allowed me these other [some] opportunities, but I want to be clear that the cost is unacceptable. It's unacceptable.

Chelsea: Right?

Charlie: And that's the option offered to young Indigenous people. That if you want to survive, you have to like, abandon your community and your culture. And that's, like, the only choice that we're given. Yet, it's the worst violence. It's not a success. And I think you know, you could look at me and say what a success story, but it's not. It's, you know, it's it's pulling yourself with, through your teeth and your spirit. Um, in a situation that should never should never happen[ed]. Like, I should never have had to experience these things. So

Leela: The main stuff that I'm dealing with [right now] is probably around putting into where I've been into the race card. Because [I agree Charlie] I was brought up in a certain way, I was born in a specific region, born into a specific [unclear maybe state, specific home Caribbean home]. Um, but then the traditional culture aspect of life, I don't necessarily practice the lifestyles. So, for me, like one of the main things I'm like dealing with right now is how do I truly identify myself? That's going to be an equitable way, where I still recognize, like, some of the privileges I hold. But then also, what are the barriers that I face? When working with other people? Umm, is [Like] one of the big things it is, there's an over representation of Black and Indigenous youth, within [name of city] [in the child welfare system, where I work], specifically.

Chelsea: It's all across the country, Leela.

Leela: Good point, Chelsea

Chelsea: Um, well, [Like] when I was in a group home, like I, one of the common things that, especially the one that I work in right now, a bunch of the youngin's they complain that, you know, people are Caucasian. There's no First Nations youth workers. So, for me, um making the choice to go into university was kind of like, um wanting to role model that?

Charlie: [That's so important, Chelsea. You know] I've never had a First Nation mentor in child and youth care, ever.

Charlie: I've never had a First Nations instructor or {3 second pause} anything.

Charlie: And so, you know, we still don't really have a capacity as a field, to invite Indigenous students and ensure that they will receive coursework and mentors, and practice opportunities that are rooted, in you know, in a strong and diverse kind of indigenous worldviews.

Ellisha: And, and I think, I also think that the system has been so stuck.

Charlie: [But we need to ask why, Ellisha. Why is it so stuck? Who benefits when it's stuck? And to answer that requires] a critical understanding of settler history, and the ideologies, that at the heart of settler colonialism, and colonialism, which show up in different ways, in all the systems in which we work, but that are this kind of, the same throughout, which is um control.

Leela: [Control, yeah] We are often never placed with our own cultures, or religions, or families that we can identify with. And even when we are, it's often times a more traumatic experience. ~~Because a lot of the times when you do certain things, or when your~~ [unclear maybe "blood"] comes from that culture. [Which] comes from that deep-rooted

intergenerational trauma that's been happening. And then we regress [~~? unclear~~] through that ~~hole~~. We in turn almost constantly combat and fight against it. And we refuse to identify to be a part of that. And it's true for me, and it's true for others CYCP that I have met who are also from Child Welfare.

Ellisha: [Yeah] Like, we're really, it's so different based on so many experiences. Privilege, I'm, you know, I mean, as a white [Jewish] privileged person I come from, you know, a a culture that tends to be more affluent and more educated. And and then I'm talking to somebody who's of indigenous background, who came from Native Family Child Services, who went to 14 different foster homes before landing in group homes. And, and I think we hear those stories and we know those stories, but we don't really truly know those stories until we look at what the systemic issues are, and how that impacts the kid.

Charlotte: In my current role, [as a white woman working in an Indigenous agency] ~~I've been volunteering with [...]~~ I think it's really humbled me in understanding my privilege. Um and recognizing even the kind of um differences in the type of care. I wouldn't say, the privilege I have in care, because I don't want to use that terminology in relationship to foster care, but, um, under the differences in my um experience of not being racialized by the care system, not entering the care system because of systemic issues, ~~um~~ such as intergenerational trauma, ~~um~~ and colonialism. However, the relationship[s] I have to ~~them~~ [the people I work with] is lived experience in the care system. So that's actually our bonding um at the base of our relationship, which is quite interesting.

Charlie: (Pause) If [you're] working with indigenous communities, ~~they~~ [you] have to know all of the history. Um, And how each of these things, systems, residential schools, the 60s scoop, the millennial scoop, the child welfare, the adoption systems are all linked together by the same very overt ideology of of basically genocide. [...] And if you don't have that historical critical perspective, then you can't understand all the many ways that the violence shows up at the individual level, at the level of the family, intergenerationally, economically, you know, health wise, and in terms of people's triggers in terms of

people's responses, um you know, you, you, you, you've [unclear, maybe "link"] several pictures of [You have to understand] what's happening to indigenous kids, in these systems and to these families, and [without that] therefore, you're, you're, you're not effective in your intervention, because you're just responded responding to the outcome, rather than the cause.

Charlie: And so, to me, care in CYC requires an understanding of that history, it requires a critical understanding of colonial ideologies and and white supremacy and and white colonialism.

Leela: [Yeah, for sure] Being a person of colour [in this field] I feel like it doesn't change anything, in the sense of a negative connotation, though. Umm, it doesn't change anything in the sense that we're still faced with the same barriers [as] being a person of color while, working in a bank or library, or being a plumber, or wherever. You're still automatically looked upon. Umm, you're still constantly faced with the million and one micro-aggressions. Of, "oh, where are you from?" "Oh, I didn't know it was your first language." "Oh, but you're speaking so well." "Or you're not as dark as I thought you would be?" Or just little things like that. And in general, it's the same in the sense of, it's the same discrimination within CYCP.

Charlie: [That's because] the field is super white, it's, it's an extremely white field, the, you know, the leading thinkers, practitioners, and scholars in the field, for the most part tend to be white men, and, um there's a few women but, um you know? It's very difficult to think of leading um CYC specific Indigenous scholars.

Chelsea: ... [Yeah, I totally know. I mentor students and go into classes to talk about my experiences, and] I still deal with a lot of people that, you know, that are, that get frustrated that they have to take, um that that they have to learn about the residential schools and everything, but the majority of the youth that are in these, um these programs that we work in, are those youth, right? So. Um so [I try to] be patient, educate,

ask questions. And to be honest, like, um I think what kind of helps me whenever I go to work, I, I try to give my 110% energy towards things. Whether, you know, that's reflecting back to how things were done, when I was growing up, and how I can shift that focus on to like, these new, these other youth, because things have changed drastically, in like since I was like a teenager.

B: So, would you say that's why you went into this field? To mentor, or role model, being First Nations and from care?

Chelsea: ~~Yeah~~ Um, I think it's a little bit of both, it's kind of wanting to, wanting to, influence positive change. Um, for me I guess for me, like, um just because I had an experience growing up, like, at the time when I was 16, and dabbling in drugs, I definitely thought it was the end of the world. Um but now that I'm like, working in the field, if I weren't, if I never experienced those, I probably wouldn't have been in this field.

B: Right.

Charlie: ~~And All of our words is sat... just saturated with stories of being in the system, you know, res, residential schools, 60s scoop, child welfare like it's just, and it's pervasive and so I never even thought twice about not sharing or not saying like it truly never even occurred to me. Um until I think, just from being in the local, like First Nations community, through my work, um um, you know, where people kind of want to know where you come from. And what brings you to the work? Yeah. Um having grown up in care always impacted the choices I made for the kinds of um practicum or practice choices I made. [...] And that was based on, you know, my experience and my kind of understanding of these issues? And that really, shaped my whole career. My practice and research interests, like it's always been at the forefront of what, what I do, and why I do what I do, and the kinds of topics and issues that I've focused on in my front-line career and my research work?~~

Charlie: Yeah, 100% I mean, it creates a sense of lived understanding and, um you know, a sense of connection of having been through those colonial systems that have harmed our communities so much over generations. And, you know, if you're trying to do working Indigenous Child Welfare without understanding of those issues, um I think you're gonna have a difficult time, building trust and accountability to communities, and young people. And that's always been my pri, my priority in my work. You know above anything else?

Charlie: (talking about what care means to her)

[And for me, when I think about this work, when I think about care] First and foremost, um it's an, like an ideology and a life commitment. Um, it's like a way of life, it's not a profession, it's, you know, you, to me you do CYC because you have an ethic of care. If you stay in it for the long term (short laugh). I mean, it, like there's transient people in the field that kind of try it out. But if it's, if you stay in the field, um you you know, you might have like an ethic of care, that drives your commitment to this work. And it doesn't have to be in CYC, um, per se. So, it could be, you know, in any realm of your life, whether you're a foster parent, or a volunteer, working in policy, you're doing research, um it's just like an ideological commitment to like extrern... being accountable to others. And to up upholding people's dignity um and well-being. Um, through an ethic of commitment and love. And, um, kind of showing up. And, you know, the rest is, you know, okay, what tools or what framework, or what concepts do you use to do that? And so for me, that's when I get into the indigenous concepts, because they're the ones that inform how I care, and why I care.

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CYC Aesthetics and the Beauty of Relational Inquiry

Wolfgang Vachon

Aesthetics

Child and Youth Care is a project that is not always beautiful. Indeed, at times it may be seen as anything but: removing children from their home, taking someone to the hospital, cleaning feces, watching a young person sentenced to jail, attending funerals, the list of such moments could fill this book. There are also the innumerable daily events CYCPs engage in as a matter of course, which don't appear to reach the extremes of beauty or its antonyms, such as serving dinner, logging paperwork, breaking up fights, bandaging bleeding cuts, and on and on. So why consider aesthetics? While aesthetics is concerned with beauty (18th Century German Aesthetics, 2014), it also engages with form (Bourriaud, 2002), purpose (Kant, 2007), context (Born et al., 2017), and the principles that underlie these elements. Considering aesthetics provides one more way to reflect upon and critique what we do in CYC.

When we watch a movie, we respond to its form (structure, shape, coherence). We keep in mind the purpose (reason) we are watching it or the purpose for which it was made. The context within which we view it (and it was made) informs our emotional and intellectual responses. We react to the beauty of its multiple elements, such as the script, cinematography, acting, editing, and sound design among other aspects. Our viewing is a subjective encounter based upon who we are in the moment of engaging. We might ask ourselves (consciously or not) is this film good, why am I watching it, how does my life at this moment lead me to watch it, appreciate it, dislike it, critique it, do I find it pleasing? Thinking aesthetically of CYC practice might consider similar questions of our interactions with a particular young person, family, community or regarding the sites(s) where we are employed. Is this field or my specific work good; what is the purpose of this choice I made, that choice they

made, our mutual responses to each other's choices; and what is the context of this young person, of myself, the particular situation, this workplace? Where we might stumble in this aesthetic framing of CYC is this idea of beauty. Why beauty? Why think of our work through the lens of beauty, particularly when we are often reminded of its uglier aspects?

The Oxford English Dictionary has multiple entries for beauty. One of several that speaks directly to this discussion defines beauty as "that quality of a person or thing which is highly pleasing or satisfying to the mind; moral or intellectual excellence" (Beauty, 2020). While beauty is not a noun or adjective, I've traditionally used in considering CYC, thinking about the qualities (characteristics, attributes) that are pleasing or satisfying about my practice, those of my colleagues and the larger field are insightful. I might, for example, consider who is pleased and whose satisfaction is attended to – and importantly, who and whose is not. I might consider what moral or cultural framework I am using to consider "excellence." What are the qualities that I pay attention to, and which do I neglect? When, and how, do I separate the person (CYCP) and the field (CYC)?

I trip on the word pleasing, because, like the times our work seems ugly, CYC does not always please. There is a difference, however, between the immediate and long-term elements of pleasing. In the moment, something may not please me, the young person, or the community, but I wonder, if our work is not ultimately pleasing, then are we doing something wrong? The child is removed from the home with the intention that they will be better off living with different guardians; we go to the hospital so the person can receive treatment; the alternative to cleaning up feces is not cleaning it; the logics of jail are for safety and rehabilitation; we attend funerals because we are part of the community and we want to be available to support those grieving and surviving. All these responses reveal relational choices that seek to please (read satisfy or meet the needs of) the situation at hand. If the results of these responses are not ultimately pleasing, if it is not eventually satisfying, if needs are not met, if there is no beauty at the end – or beautiful ending – then perhaps we need to reconsider them. Perhaps we could do, or create something different. In considering if we please, and whom or what we please, we are thinking through the aesthetics of relational practice. We are imagining how form, purpose, context, beauty and the principles that underlie these elements

exist within CYC – or don't. Not every ending is beautiful, but what might happen if we strive towards that end?

Aesthetics of Relational Inquiry

I am currently pursuing a PhD exploring the experiences of CYCPs from care (CYCPfC), my dissertation provisionally entitled *Tuning into Child and Youth Care: An Arts-Based Audio-Drama Inquiry with Child and Youth Care Practitioners who have Lived in Residential Care*. These CYCPfC include students, practitioners, and educators, working in a variety of settings and at various stages of their careers from multiple regions across Canada. There are several elements to the inquiry, including collectively creating applied audio dramas, wherein we make fictionalized stories based upon the experiences of CYCPfC. Through the inquiry, we are exploring how being from care and working as a CYCP is understood, conceptualized, theorized, and performed by CYCPfC, and consider what it does to CYC to have CYCPfC. This arts-based inquiry explicitly exists in the aesthetic and the relational, we are collectively creating aesthetic products – audio dramas.

While much has been written on research with, and about, children and youth across multiple disciplines, there has been remarkably little written specifically about the theories, practices, and constructions of research from a CYC orientation, at least in our published literature. There is, however, an exciting and emerging body of research done by CYCPs, much of it from undergraduate and graduate students informed by their diverse interests and experiences. Having read numerous undergraduate Masters, and Ph.D. theses, I think these contain some of the most interesting, provocative, rigorous, and theoretically sound research being produced in CYC. Unfortunately for all of us, the majority of this does not make it into publication.¹

¹ For those who are interested in this important body of work, searching the University of Victoria's DSpace (<https://dspace.library.uvic.ca>) or Ryerson University's Digital Repository (<https://digital.library.ryerson.ca/>) provides open-access to many revealing and provocative CYC inquiries. I highlight these two schools as they both have graduate CYC programs and make their students' work accessible. There are other schools around the world that are also training graduate (University of Strathclyde) and undergraduate (MacEwan University, Humber College) CYC practitioners in research, although most of these theses never make it beyond the instructor who taught the course or the committee that reviews the research.

I situate my current work within arts-based inquiry, which is particularly well suited for CYC (although, as numerous colleagues like to remind me, certainly not the only approach). While I work primarily within arts-based inquiry, most of the concepts that I am exploring within the aesthetics of relational inquiry are relevant across multiple research methodologies ("the overall framework of the investigation" Miles et al. 2020, p. 321) and methods ("the procedures ... followed to collect information of various types and from whom", p. 321). The aesthetics of relational inquiry in CYC, as I conceptualize them at the half-way point of my Ph.D., work best when they are practices that resonate with all the inquiry participants and align with CYC approaches. As an initial mapping, I propose eight CYC elements, which I see fitting within the aesthetic frame of form, purpose, context, and beauty.

Becoming relational

One of the few articles about CYC inquiry published in a CYC journal is by Bellefeuille and Ricks (2010). They write, "if CYC is to be relation-centred in its very essence, relational inquiry must be understood as an epistemological approach to understanding how we know what we know and how that knowledge is grounded in connectivity within everything that we do" (p. 1240). Laying out orientations towards connectivity within a relational inquiry paradigm, they posit such an approach depends "upon connectivity, communication, participation, and pure love for wanting to know" (p. 1236). Orientations that would likely be easy for most CYCPs to embrace. Collapsing the distinctions between "practice" and "research" Bellefeuille and Ricks suggest that all CYC relational engagements are potential sites of inquiry, with each participant provided the opportunity to learn about themselves, the other, and how to move forward.

Learning through inquiry is what CYCPs do during our interactions with young people and their families (Garfat, T., Freeman, J., Gharabaghi, K., & Fulcher, L., 2018, p. 14). While there may be differences in how the inquiry is done – for example, working with a young person in a school who is bullying others in contrast to conducting a quantitative analysis of bullying incidents in primary schools across a country – all inquiries involve asking questions, analyzing what is revealed, learning from this "data," and doing something with this new knowledge. The questions asked depend on

purpose and *context*, which in turn reveals the necessary *form* to ask the questions: what is the methodology, what is the method?

In *Tuning into CYC*, I sought out and invited CYCPs that had lived in residential placement. We started by meeting in groups, introducing ourselves, sharing, eating, laughing, playing, improvising, and otherwise relating. Each had different knowledge, wisdom, skills, and stakes in the process, and this, I think, is both essential to and enhances the relationality of inquiry processes. Thinking of the co-created space (Garfat et al., 2018) as a place of relational inquiry potentially shifts the dynamic from expert/subject, service provider/receiver, powerful/powerless to co-inquirers. Everyone involved in the process brings their unique constellations of knowledge (learned) and wisdom (reflected upon) to bear on the inquiry. Rather than seeing researchers, or practitioners, as the ones with the most knowledge, “a relational inquiry approach to research and practice, on the other hand, is discovery-oriented and emphasizes how meaning (i.e., data) emerges out of co-created, embodied, and dialogical encounters among all participants (Bellefeuille and Ricks, 2010, p. 1238).

Becoming community

At the time of this writing, *Tuning into CYC* has been actively meeting for close to a year. We share experiences, life changes, academic & career shifts, provocative conversations, and explore many aspects of being CYCPfC. Much of this is then turned into improvisations, which are scripted and performed for audio dramas. Over time community develops. Inquiry has this capacity to foster the creation of community through the process. Bourriaud (2002) coined the term relational aesthetics; he suggested that artworks should be judged “on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt” (p.112). I see Bourriaud’s criteria just as relevant for the aesthetics of relational inquiry, and all forms of relational practice. What inter-human relations does the inquiry process (and eventual product) produce or prompt? How can our engagement as CYCPs (practitioners, educators, researchers, supervisors, writers, etc.) build community?

Becoming reflexive

Inquiry requires thinking. A lot of thinking. This, of course, is true for all forms of CYC practice. During *Tuning into CYC*, a lot of my thinking analyzes myself, what I did, why I did it, what else I could have done, what I might do differently, why I choose particular analytical lens and not others, etcetera. Often these reflections are shared with other people involved in the project, in particular CYCPfC and my supervising committee members, who then provide additional layers of analysis for all of us to consider. Reflexivity is considered a foundational aspect of our practice (Stuart, 2013). However, uncritical self-reflection may lead to self-congratulatory refraction obscuring productive self-critique “leave[ing] the layers of embedded oppressive thought intact and unnoticed, in favour of a liberalized self-presentation as good and noble (Amponsah and Stephen, 2020 p. 15). As Amponsah and Stephen pointed out, the skills of critical self-reflection need to be taught and nurtured. Becoming reflexive is a never-ending process, which could benefit from including the analytics of aesthetic inquiry (beauty, form, purpose, context, and the principles that underlie these ideas).

Becoming ethical

Ethics are essential to any inquiry process and every CYC engagement. Often, ethics are presented as restrictions and prohibitions, behaviours one should not partake in. These are necessary given the history of abusive research and practice on children and youth. Ethics, however, need not remain a space of prohibitions. Fewster (1999) invited us to think of boundaries as places to meet, for one “Self” to engage with another, ethics can function similarly. The Standards of Practice of the Association of Child and Youth Care (2017) frames ethics as proactive moves we can take as practitioners. While not without “don’ts,” The Standards focuses on do’s, framing each of its five areas as “Responsibilities” to, rather than prohibitions from.

Drawing upon productive ethical principles – whereby ethics are considered a means to create possibilities, not only, or primarily, sanctions (Faulkner and Tallis, 2009) – during *Tuning into CYC*, in addition to the University’s ethical review, we collectively created our own internal ethical guidelines for how we would engage. We did this through a generative

visual arts process that invited intersections, visually representing where we (as inquiring people) and ethical practices convened. Becoming ethical includes asking, what might be created if we thought of all relational engagements as co-created ethical invitations to find the places that we meet? Here I draw upon White's (in press) definition of relational ethics:

Instead of thinking about ethics as an individual responsibility, relational ethics situate ethical challenges, commitments, and actions squarely in the realm of ongoing relational processes. We are relational beings who co-construct meaning, identities, and actions with others – each of whom has their own relational histories, ways of doing things, and experiences.

Becoming pleasurable

The notion of enjoyment or pleasure as criteria in considering methodology may not be held as relevant by all researchers. However, there is potentiality when we introduce these conditions for consideration. Quoting Peter Reason, Foster (2016) writes, "if human inquiry is not exciting, life enhancing, even pleasurable, then what is it worth?" (quoted in Foster, 2016, p. 134). Pleasure becomes a political and ethical stance when researching with people, particularly when the researcher is asking them to speak, write, document, act, or otherwise generate material regarding (potentially) difficult aspects of their lives.

While research is more than "enjoyable programming," considering how to program enjoyment into research is worthwhile. Through conscious consideration of affective breadth, there is an attunement to emotional and ethical states beyond distress and avoiding harm. Including pleasure as a criterion invites attending to ways of fostering health and wellness through inquiry (Baxter and Low, 2017), beginning with emotional conditions during the process. By considering pleasure during inquiry, we are attending to broader concepts of CYC. Aesthetic practices ask, how can we bring joy into the lives of those we engage with, be that during research, "front-line practice", supervising, teaching or any other form of CYC engagements?

Becoming care

The word “care” is ubiquitous in CYC, yet exists largely under-considered, under-theorized, and minimally studied within our field (Thomson, 2018; Vachon, 2020). It is worth asking, can we care if we don’t (or are unable to) articulate what care is? Steckley and Smith (2011) describe care as being interdependent, reciprocal, dialogic, fallible, and flexible. Each of these elements also applies to aesthetics of relational inquiry. We might also flip Steckley and Smith’s elements of care and think of care through the lens of aesthetics. How do we care (form); why do we care (purpose); who cares with/for whom, where does the care take place (context); and does the recipient as well as the provider experience it as beautiful or pleasing? Like ethics and pleasure discussed above, considering inquiry as a process of care has generative possibilities. Including care within CYC inquiry not only reflects what CYC purports to be, it may also lead to new formulations of what relational CYC can become.

Becoming critical

Inquiry serves particular agendas, just as practice does. While at times CYC has defaulted to an apparently apolitical construction, this frequently masks the position(s) taken. In providing useful ways to consider African-centred solidarity in CYC, Amponsah and Stephen (2020) write:

A careful examination of the tools that are used in the creation of knowledge in child and youth care will reinforce some key facts: (a) Knowledge creation happens as a part of multiple, historical, sociopolitical processes; (b) White, upper-middle class, European people (predominantly men) have controlled these processes; (c) These processes have been strategically constructed to benefit White, upper-middle class, European people at the expense of others, including non-European people. These facts have shown up in consistent ways through the texts, discourses, and ideological orientations found in many spaces of higher learning (2020 p. 12).

One site of knowledge production is inquiry, and the above realities are either perpetuated or challenged through every inquiry process. The ideological orientations informing the inquiry process may be overt, covert, or unintentional but always exists (as it does in every interaction a CYC has with a young person, family member, or community constituent). There is a recent and growing body of CYC literature which has been providing insights regarding the racist and other oppressive legacies of CYC (for those who had not previously been conscious of it). If inquirers were to critically examine and name the tools each inquiry process uses, then CYC inquiry could contribute to manifesting a different way of being (inquiring) with children, youth families, and communities. When we apply the analytics of aesthetics to relational CYC inquiry, we understand what the tools do: their form, their purpose, the context in which they are used, whom they please, and what they serve. We begin to understand why some people, and positions, find particular tools so beautiful – and others do not.

Becoming skilled

Every person involved in the inquiry process brings skills and knowledge, some of which they come prepared to share; indeed, this is the very reason they are part of the inquiry. Aesthetic inquiry assemblages consider creative ways to bring people, and their attendant abilities, into the process. Becoming skilled means fostering a place of mutual sharing and learning. During *Tuning into CYC*, we strove to honour and invite the many skills present, including abilities in writing, acting, visual arts, web design, caring, supporting, questioning, and thinking, among other skills. The insights, knowledge, and capabilities of the group continue to provide new ways of understanding and developing the project. Ethical CYC inquiry is not extractive; rather, it becomes a place of development, skill-sharing, learning, and growth for everyone involved.

Becoming

By starting from these eight CYC elements fitting within the aesthetic frame of form, purpose, context, and beauty, I recognize that inquiry is not a matter of description alone, it can be generative. We create and learn through the inquiry process. Returning to Bellefeuille and Ricks (2010), “a relational inquiry approach to research and practice ... is discovery-oriented

and emphasizes how meaning (i.e., data) emerges out of co-created, embodied, and dialogical encounters among all participants" (p. 1238). We become through what we do in the inquiry process, in a similar way that we become through our practice, and those we work with become through their interactions with us. I have participated in several research projects, multiple theatre productions, and thousands of individual moments with young people; these all form me. When I am a subject in someone else's inquiry, and they ask me questions, I learn from and am shaped by those questions. The preparing, considering, and answering those questions changes who I am. Inquiry changes us, whether we are a "practitioner," a "researcher," a "subject," or a "consumer" of the inquiry. We become through relational inquiry.

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