Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care
2016 – Vol.15, No.3

Perspectives on love as a component of professional practice

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Abstract

Since children and youth are often cared for by many professionals who are trained and educated in different disciplinary traditions, it is important that child and youth care (CYC) practitioners who work alongside other professionals have knowledge of how love is understood across different disciplines. Through a review of current literature in the fields of health care, education and CYC, this article explores the perceptions of love across different fields where CYC is practised. It begins by defining love in a manner that reflects the engagement and interactions between individuals in professional and public relationships, and differentiates this from the kind of love present in private relationships. It then focuses on the ways that love is currently being talked about and practised in different professional contexts. While there is increasing openness to talk about love across the human service fields, and some similarities in the questions and assertions that are being raised, there are also differences of opinion regarding love's place in professional practice both within and across practice domains. In contemplating the varying perceptions of love, I hope to offer the reader an opportunity to be more mindful about the role of love in their own professional practice.

Keywords

Love, health care, education, child and youth care

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Vincent, J. (2016). Perspectives on love as a component of professional practice. [Joint Special Issue, Love in Professional Practice] *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, 15*(3) and *International Journal of Social Pedagogy, 5*(1), 6-21. doi: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2017.02
Available online www.celcis.org/journal and http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/uclpress/ijsp. SJRCC is published by CELCIS, ISSN: 1478 – 1840. IJSP is published by UCL Press. ISSN: 2051-5804

In Western, English speaking cultures, the word love is used and understood with multiple interrelated meanings. We do not have one shared understanding of the meaning of love, and hence meaning is often lost or misinterpreted in conversations on the topic (Stickley & Freshwater, 2002). Perhaps, if we had such an understanding, love as both an emotion and an action would be better understood (hooks, 2000, p. 3). Since children and youth are often cared for by many professionals who are trained and educated in different disciplinary traditions, it is important that child and youth care (CYC) practitioners who work alongside other professionals have knowledge of how love is understood across different disciplines. While discussions about love's role in professional practice and the public sphere of service relationships are emerging, and rich descriptions of loving practice are adding to our understanding of love, there continues to be some uncertainty about love's place in professional interactions.

The risks and challenges of talking about and defining love within professional practice have been expressed throughout the literature (Arman & Rensfeldt, 2006; Hargreaves, 2000; Hoyle & Slater, 2001; Loreman, 2011; Smith, 2006; Stickley & Freshwater, 2002). Simply bringing love into conversations outside the context of familial and romantic relationships often seems to evoke feelings of uneasiness (Smith, 2011). While there are risks associated with embracing an oversimplified representation of love, one that is "indulgent and romanticized", in professional practice, the benefits of a love that is contemplative and encourages critical engagement are also recognized (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 811). Smith (2011) suggests that the ambivalence that exists toward love in professional settings is a symptom of modernist ideals which assert that as a professional, one must be able to separate their personal experiences and emotions from their interactions in the professional environment. Smith (2011) dismisses the notion that reason can be separated from emotion, and characterizes the idea that the personal self can be separated from the professional self as a "modernist conceit" (p. 190). Love cannot be erased from public, professional interactions, but in acknowledging love in professional contexts, Hargreaves (2000) also cautions that we cannot diminish emotions to "technical competencies" (p. 814). Classifying emotion work or "emotion management" as a competency with a set of defined behaviours which act as a structured guide to enable the identification, evaluation and advancement of specified behaviours in individual professionals "limits how we approach, understand and try to shape the emotional work that people do" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 814). Arman and Rehnsfeldt (2006) draw attention to the challenge of extracting and contemplating love as a practice distinct from other concepts, such as "empathy, presence and relationships", that have over time become mired. They pose the question, "is love, like suffering, by its ontological depth a concept that we need to recapture to enrich and deepen the art of caring in order alleviate patients' suffering?" (Arman & Rehnsfeldt, 2006, p. 5). Notwithstanding the many complexities of entering into conversations about love's place in the caring professions it is necessary to continue the dialogue in

order to encourage thoughtful engagement with love, and other emotions, in professional practice. Hoyle and Slater (2001) suggest that within the confines of "modern capitalist democracies" (p. 790) it is increasingly important to engage in conversations about love's role in practice, as love offers a counterpoint to individual competition, anomie, and capitalist ideals that are often privileged in Western cultures.

Love's Components

In contemplating the role of love in professional practice, many authors have drawn attention to related concepts, such as care, compassion and empathy (Arman & Rehnsfeldt, 2006; Giata, 2012; hooks, 2000; Smith, 2011). Perhaps this is because throughout modern history there has been a greater sense of openness and comfort with talking about how these concepts fit within the realm of public relationships. Jacono (1993) suggests that our lack of comprehension of 'what loving is' within society causes fear and uneasiness towards the term. This fear then leads us to seek out alternative ways to convey loving. Caring, according to Jacono (1993), is simply a "euphemism for the word loving" (p. 193). By relying on euphemisms to communicate our emotions and actions, the intention of those actions is diluted. However drawing on related concepts, and understandings of love presented from various historical and cultural perspectives, also provides the opportunity to add great depth and richness to the descriptions of love in professional practice that are developing in the academic literature and entering into conversations in daily practice. Care, acceptance, empathy, sympathy, compassion, presence, recognition, respect, honesty, commitment, trust, and a sense of community are all identified throughout the literature as key components of loving interactions and loving relationships (Giata, 2012; hooks, 2000; Arman & Rehnsfeldt, 2006; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013; Hoyle & Slater, 2001). While related, these concepts individually, represent only pieces of a larger picture. Yet, without them, we cannot achieve a complete understanding of loving in professional practice.

Love Beyond Emotion

There is strong consensus throughout the literature that love is not simply an emotion or idea; it is not a passive engagement. Love is active and intentional, and it is communicated through behaviours as well as words (Arman & Rehnsfeldt, 2006; hooks, 2000; Jacono, 1993; Lanas & Zembylas, 2014; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013; Smith, 2011). Love is not simply present, it is "embodied and performative…brought into existence by doing" (Lanas & Zembylas, 2014, p. 36). Butot (2004) explains that she perceives a notion of love in practice which extends beyond emotion, and includes the conception of love as "a stance, approach or way of being; a choice to move in the direction of a loving way of

seeing, hearing and experiencing the other" (Butot, 2004, p. 1). The ability to offer, and the ability to accept are both important features of loving (Jacono, 1993, p. 194). Love is sometimes expressed more honestly by the way we treat others, than by the words we say to them (Smith, 2011, p, 192). Declarations of love are often made in relationships in which one or both parties act towards the other in ways that are indifferent, neglectful or abusive. However, hooks (2000) would argue that such declarations of love are false, because "no one can rightfully claim to be loving when behaving abusively" (p. 22). While words can express love, to speak the word "love" to another does not necessarily convey loving, as it is described in the literature. Love is wilful (hooks, 2000), and requires conscious effort. Every human relationship, whether fleeting or invested and long lasting, creates a space that holds the potential for loving interaction (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2007). The choice to love is not a singular decision; it is a choice that we must continuously reaffirm (Lanas & Zembylas, 2014, p. 36). An ethos of "service beyond self" (Hoyle & Slater, 2001), and striving to understand and ensure the well-being of the other (Arman &Rehnsfeldt, 2006) are at love's core. Justice and integrity are love's prerequisites, without them love cannot grow (hooks, 2000). Love creates openness and opportunity that enables vulnerability (Brito et al., 2014). As a universally understood human condition, vulnerability, though often very personal, holds potential to bring people together (Brito et al., 2014) and nurture loving relationships. The emotional understanding involved in loving another is not simple, there are no step by step instructions, and in every relationship love unfolds differently. Unlike cognitive understanding, developing emotional understanding is not a linear process. It occurs "instantaneously, at a glance, as people reach down into their past emotional experiences and `read' the emotional responses of those around them" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 815). With attentiveness to those instantaneous readings and mindfulness to the others needs for welfare, love is possible.

Teaching and Learning about Love

Loving requires practice (Fromm, 1956; Stickley & Freshwater, 2002). Fromm (1956) suggests that there are no prescriptions for developing the capacity to love. Rather than being taught how to love directly, we learn to love indirectly through daily practice, mindfulness, being in loving relationships, experiencing security and closeness, and caring interactions with others. All people possess the capacity to love, but they need guidance in order to develop that capacity. It is the responsibility of adults to provide "guidance in the ways of love" to all children (hooks, 2000, 29). Love cannot be contingent on meeting expectations, and children need to "perceive that they are loved, cared, and accepted as they are", not only when they have attained a certain standard (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013, p. 90). Määttä & Uusiautti (2013) describe the role of pedagogical love, love to all, regardless of their aptitude and skills, in the formal education of children. The practice of pedagogical love is unaffected by the response of the

recipient. It does not involve seeking to indulge a student's every want. It is concerned with strengthening learners' perseverance and self-discipline. Instead of focusing on students' dependence or independence, relationships founded on pedagogical love seek to recognize mutual dependence and the need for relational connection with others. It is not possible to foster meaningful relationships or pedagogical love, while also attempting to hold on to a position of power over another (Gharabaghi, 2008a; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013). The structures of power present in the "long discredited disease models of treatment" are counterproductive to the practice of building meaningful therapeutic relationships (Gharabaghi, 2008a, p. 31). According to Määttä & Uusiautti (2013) pedagogical love is not simply the natural warm feelings a teacher has for their students, it is a contemplative, reflective way of teaching. This mindful approach to teaching holds the potential to bolster learners' success through unconditional acceptance, "positive learning experiences", excitement about learning and "perceived success" (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013, p. 97).

Love in the Caring Professions

In relational fields of work, where daily interactions, and in some cases formal role descriptions, include engaging in helping and supporting others in the context of a professional caring relationship, love is an essential element of practice (Smith, 2011, p. 189). Many people from many traditions have looked at love in different ways. In an attempt to understand the role of love in child and youth care it may be helpful to understand more about how love is viewed in other professional contexts that CYC practitioners might be employed in. The sections that follow highlight discussions about love that are taking place within the literature from the fields of health care, education and child and youth care.

Health care. Love has been recognized as an important component of practice for health care professionals, including paramedics (Wahlin, Wieslander & Fridlund, 1995), nurses (Arman & Rehnsfeldt, 2006; Kendrick & Robinson, 2002; Stickley & Freshwater, 2002), and physicians (Willer, 2014), throughout the field. One might assume a duality between medical science and the relational foundation of loving, however the literature regarding the practice of love in health care professions does not support such division. Klaver and Baart (2011) express that "professional loving care is explicitly not the opposite of good medicine" (p. 687). While competent medical care is important, "the relief of pain or curing diseases is never a goal in itself" (p. 687); the primary aim for all caregivers is to be attentive to the needs of the other. The daily practices of nursing and caring are infused with loving practice, through both the giving and receiving of love in carer-patient interactions. However an explicit connection between the practices of nursing and loving is not identified (Stickley & Freshwater, 2002). The practice of compassionate love in health care goes beyond the provision of social support; instead of focusing on caring words and

behaviours, compassionate love also attends to the other's thoughts and emotions (Willer, 2014). Though similar to compassion, empathy and bonding, compassionate love is different in that its focus is more comprehensive; compassionate love is offered to everyone at all times, rather than being specifically focused on those who are experiencing suffering (Underwood, 2009; Kendrick & Robinson, 2002). Where the word compassion alone "can imply detachment", compassionate love implies "emotional engagement" and "emphasizes the enhancement of human flourishing" (Underwood, 2009, p. 4). According to Underwood (2009) "free choice for the other", "some degree of accurate cognitive understanding of the situation, the other and oneself", "valuing the other at a fundamental level", "openness and receptivity", and "response of the 'heart'" (p. 8) are the defining qualities of compassionate love. While conversations related to love in health care practice have traditionally focused on nurses (Willer, 2014), Willer's (2014) research on health care providers' compassionate love and women's infertility stressors indicates that patients perceptions of physicians' compassionate love also have positive effects on self-esteem and treatment stress levels. Willer (2014) suggests that medical care which extends beyond the treatment of suffering and physical health enhances the determination and enthusiasm that patients bring to their treatment.

While the patient's experience of being cared for is compromised when health care professionals "ignore the human side of healing" (Greil, 2002, p. 110), the literature also recognizes that bringing love into every interaction is not simple or easy. Research regarding compassion fatigue and the stresses sometimes involved in caring and relational work, is in fact more prevalent than research related to the positive impacts of compassionate care (Willer, 2014). Campbell (as cited in Kendrick & Robinson, 2002) proposed the term "moderate love" to describe "how love is shaped and refined to meet the conflicting demands of practice" (p. 293). Health care professionals who typically need to monitor and attend to the needs of multiple patients may not always be able to spend the time and demonstrate their loving in the exact ways they would like, because they have professional responsibility to provide care for other patients who are also deserving of the same loving. In caring for others, caregivers also need to attend to and care for their own wellbeing. Being able to love oneself is an important aspect of being able to give love to others, and in turn receive their love (Arman & Rehnsfeldt, 2006). Klaver and Baart (2011) contend that in the field of health care, professionalism and loving care are interconnected because of the relational nature of providing care for others. They explain that the entire system of care needs to be adapted in order to "structurally guarantee professional loving care" (p. 687).

Education. In the field of education, teaching the curriculum to students is one important component of an educator's role, though it is not the only important component. Teaching is not only about a subject matter, it is also about

students, as teachers teach students (Elton, 2000). In order to support students' academic success, teachers need to engage with their students and remain attentive to their emotional health (Brito et al., 2014; Gaita, 2012; Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012; Noddings, 1995). A teacher's interactions with their students sets the foundation for the learning atmosphere in the classroom (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). Määttä & Uusiautti (2012) identify teachers work as "a form of relationship work" (p. 32). Teaching is a mutual engagement, with teachers and students traveling together on a "path of continuous discovery" (Elton, 2000, p. 260). Without awareness of this joint endeavour and a sense of excitement the quality of teaching and learning are both impacted (Elton, 2000, p. 260). Classroom relationships and the emotional bond between teachers and students are the elements that set the framework for the development of academic concepts. Giata (2012) cautions that the significance of relationships in teaching must not be overlooked, because without entering into a relationship with another it is not possible to understand anything about them (p. 761). Teachers often hold a significant place in the lives of their students, it should therefore be appropriate and sensible for them to spend time and effort in their work on fostering caring relationships (Noddings, 1995, p. 679). Though the balance of power in a teacher – student relationship is asymmetrical, with the teacher holding power over the student, the teacher must view the student as a potential equal, regardless of the current power imbalance, in order to maintain a positive relationship and support the student's learning and growth towards independence (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p. 26).

Recognition of, and attention to emotions in the classroom is also pertinent to students' education. Teachers who "work affectively" are able to be "more effective in the learning situation" because students' "cognitive scaffolding is held together with emotional bonds" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 817). Good teaching involves more than subject matter expertise and high competency ratings; good teachers are emotionally responsive, "passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy," (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). Teachers' and school leaders' emotions can impact the students, parents and other staff they encounter in the school both positively and negatively. Emotion cannot be extracted from the school environment, and by working in a context imbued with emotions teachers have the capacity to "make classrooms exciting or dull" and school leaders "can turn colleagues into risk-takers or cynics" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 812). They therefore need to consciously attend to the emotional environment of the classroom and the school in order to foster a caring, compassionate learning atmosphere (Hargreaves, 1998; Hoyle & Slater, 2001). Emotional relationships support positive social outcomes and learning and growth for students in areas that are not necessarily addressed in traditional academic curriculum (Hargreaves, 1998. 840). Hargreaves (2000) suggests that though it is essential to recognize and attend to emotions in education, the process of emotional engagement should

involve critical thought, so as to avoid romanticism and self-indulgence. Noddings (1988) describes the potential of care to support positive emotional engagement and educational outcomes for students. She explains that care "expands students' cultural literacy", "helps us connect the standard subjects", and "can give students a feeling of wholeness in their education" (Noddings, 1995, p. 676). The role of a caring teacher is to respond to "the needs, wants, and initiations" of their students (Noddings, 1988, p. 219). A teacher's caring response is "characterized by engrossment (non-selective attention or total presence to the other for the duration of the caring interval) and displacement of motivation (her motive energy flows in the direction of the other's needs and projects)" (Noddings, 1988, p. 219). A caring teacher attends to the emotions of their student and acts to support their well-being.

Like care, love also holds the potential to positively influence both students' and teachers' educational experiences (Giata, 2012; Johnson, 1991; Lanas & Zembylas, 2014. Lanas & Zembylas). Lanas and Zembylas (2014) argue that in the field of education love has remained largely absent from discussions in the academic literature and as a result the "transformative power of love" has not been fully recognized (p. 33). In contrast to elementary teachers, secondary school teachers were "more likely to describe their positive relationships with students in terms of acknowledgement and respect than loving and liking" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 820). Throughout the literature, the positive impact of loving interactions were not specified to any particular age group. Lanas and Zembylas (2014) suggest that research and conversations about love need to continue in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the potential schools and teachers hold for educating loving citizens. Noddings (1995) advises that we need to expand the goals of education to include fostering "caring, competent, loving, and lovable people" (Noddings, 1995, p. 676). Love is not a competency that can be measured (Hargreaves, 2000). It is a disservice to teachers and to students to reduce love and the emotional work that teachers do to technical competencies; doing so limits our understanding and ability to recognize new potential for love in educational practice (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 814). Patience, trust and forgiveness are signs of love in teaching (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013, p. 98). Friere (1998) speaks to the salience of patience in teaching, noting that it is "impossible to teach without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up" (p. 1998). He emphasizes, "in short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well thought-out capacity to love'' (Friere, 1998, p. 3). At times when a student is struggling to progress, and their development is slow or inconsistent, a loving teacher ensures that the student's trust in their own learning is preserved through periods of frustration (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013, p. 99). Johnson (1991) explains that teaching students to accept themselves requires love. She reveals "I know lots of ways to teach subtraction, lots of ways to help children improve their printing, I only know one way to convince [them] that they are loved. The way to do that, for me, is to love them" (Johnson, 1991, p. 84). A teacher's love is not contingent on their students' abilities or

behaviour; love is given freely to all students (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). Love and positive emotional experiences influence how we view and experience the world around us; when children experience joy, and the feeling of being loved and capable at school they are able to focus their attention and energy on attaining their goals (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013). According to Daniels (2012, as cited in Lanas & Zembylas, 2014) a teacher's love is characterized by a "deep commitment to protecting, caring for, and empowering students in the face of social barriers and oppressions" along with "a political passion to inspire and support marginalized youth'' (p.34). Brito et al. (2014) suggest that "education, at its core, is an act of love" (para. 1) in that it continuously seeks to empower others through supporting the development of knowledge and critical thinking.

Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) describe the interconnection of pedagogical love with pedagogical authority in education. Pedagogical love "means loving students wholly without expecting any rewards or services in return" (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p.25). It has been identified as a key element of good teaching. A loving teacher unfailingly seeks to support student's welfare, they have innate trust in students' learning and assist them to recognize and shape the elements of their own development (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). Teachers demonstrate pedagogical love through their "trust and belief in the learners' talents, presence, attachment, intimacy and positive sense of duty to support" (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p. 29). Pedagogical authority involves "power, prestige, status, influence, or paragon" (p. 25). Authority can be built on the coercion or reward of subordinates; it can be legitimate and "based on proficiency" and "expertise", or it can be individual and stem from "personal characteristics" (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p.25). In general, authority means the same as influence, and its essence "depends on whether the influence is based on coercion or shared understanding" (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p.26). Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) explain that each teacher's capacity for pedagogical love and pedagogical authority is unique, and that teachers influence the learning environment through how love and authority are practiced and demonstrated in their interactions with students. The ability to recognize and attend to students changing needs for varying degrees of pedagogical love and pedagogical authority, and then subsequently adapt one's own interaction style to meet the needs of the student is known as pedagogical tact (Haavio, 1948, as cited in Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p. 30). Mindfulness towards one's own natural interaction style and flexibility in altering or adapting to another style (i.e., their level of pedagogical tact) enables greater responsiveness to students' needs (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p. 32). There is not a singular style of interaction that will meet all students' needs, or even a single student's needs at all times; it would therefore be unreasonable to propose any singular ideal or archetype of pedagogical love and pedagogical authority for all teachers to strive toward (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p. 32).

The aim of maintaining professional distance in teaching is arguably counterproductive to the goal of supporting students to learn. Loreman (2011) proposes that the notion of professional distance impairs teachers and students, as well as the broader society in that it prioritizes a model of relationships that inhibits meaningful connection to others. Though education in the traditional academic domains will likely continue to be a priority for many in the field of education, there is a need to recognize other educational priorities (Hoyle & Slater, 2001). Academic competition and measures of cognitive performance "need not take the place of happiness, love and service" (Hoyle & Slater, 2001, p. 794). Embracing a vision of a more "flexible professionalism" empowers teachers to adapt and shift their interaction style to accommodate students' needs and with a loving outlook meet each student where they are at (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012, p. 29).

Child and youth care. Child and youth care (CYC) is a diverse field, with practitioners providing support to children, youth and families across a variety of settings. Relational engagement and being in relationship with another are central features of CYC practice regardless of the practice setting. The relationship between a CYC practitioner and a child is, itself, often identified as the intervention (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012; Gharabaghi, 2008a; Stuart, 2009; Thumbadoo, 2011). Within the field, conversations regarding relationship often refer to the space between individuals (Gharabaghi, 2008b), the "in-between" between two people (Garfat, 2008), or "co-created space" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). The concept of space and dimension helps to create distinction between being in relationships and having relationships. Garfat & Fulcher (2012) differentiate between having relationships, something all people do, and being in a relationship, which involves meaningful, attentive engagement and has an impact on both individuals involved (p. 9). The co-created space between a CYC practitioner and a child who are in relationship together is influenced by each individual and their unique life experiences and knowledge, as well as the shared interactions between them (Gharabaghi 2008b p. 191). Gharabaghi (2008b) draws attention to the significance of our values in relationships with children and youth, identifying values as the "underlying thread of all healthy relationships" (p. 185). It is not possible to extract one's values from their interactions with others, or their decision making; values, therefore are "integrally connected to ethics in the field" (Gharabaghi, 2008b, p. 185). In the value ridden context of relational CYC practice, objectivity is a misleading notion. Objectivity suggests that CYC practitioners are capable of contemplating matters and decisions from a position outside of their individual biases, interpretations, and feelings, which is not possible while profoundly engaged in relationship with another. Conversely, subjectivity "allows us to incorporate our values, biases and judgment into the relationships we have with children and youth, and by doing so we can mitigate their potentially harmful effects" (Gharabaghi, 2008b, p. 191). The aim in CYC is for practitioners to be mindful of their values and act ethically, "in moral as opposed to merely technical ways" (Smith, 2006, p.6).

The field's title 'child and youth care' calls to mind the centrality of acts of caring in relationships with others (Ranahan, 2000). Caring and relationship are strongly tied. The primary focus of care is that it is "relational"; it concerns two individuals and everything that happens between them (Smith, 2006, p. 6). Ricks (1992) asserts that caring is the foundation of CYC practice. There is recognition across the CYC field that caring extends beyond the daily tasks of attending to a child's physical needs; it is not simply a procedural endeavour (Ranahan, 2000; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2007; Smith, 2011; Thumbadoo, 2011). Caring in CYC involves both action and outlook; it is a way of seeing the world and being with others, a "disposition" (Smith, 2006, p. 9; Smith, 2007). According to Smith (2006), caring is not simply a practical venture, it is "ultimately a moral endeavour" (p. 5). Caring is demonstrated through recognizing and responding to another's needs, adapting one's interaction style in order to provide necessary support, "demonstrating patience, honesty, and trust; instilling hope in order to promote growth and courage to face the unknown; having a willingness to learn without arrogance; and possessing humility" (Ranahan, 2000, para. 3). Words are not necessary to communicate caring (Smith, 2007, para. 6). Caring in CYC is not something that is saved for, or withheld from particular children (Smith, 2006). Smith (2006) asserts that though there may be times we encounter relationships with clients that are conflictual, we "nevertheless feel and have a responsibility towards them – a responsibility that is infinite and demands nothing in return" (p. 8).

Love has also been recognized as an important component of relational CYC practice. The significance of therapeutic relationships and the daily life context of practice in CYC create the right conditions for interactions that some would describe as loving. Smith (2011) suggests that as an inherently "practical, moral and relational endeavour" (p. 192), CYC generates an ideal environment for love to develop and grow. Love grows in the little details and the routine tasks of daily life events. In CYC practice, life space intervention promotes growth through everyday moment-to-moment interactions. A child's growth and the means by which it is achieved are not necessarily quantifiable. The caretaking tasks that CYC practitioners do are not necessarily meaningful or capable of promoting growth and conveying love. Expressing love has more to do with how a task is done, how the practitioner imbues love in the task, than what the task is (Thumbadoo, 2011, p. 194). At the same time, expressing love involves more than the verbal communication of a practitioners feelings. It involves translating feelings into actions (Thumbadoo, 2011, p. 194). Ranahan (2000) argues that "the act of caring is concrete, specific, and detailed" (para. 22), whereas loving extends beyond this, and entails how the practitioner brings the Self into the relationship with the other. Garfat and Fulcher (2012) identify CYC practice as an act of "love and loving", in that CYC practitioners attend to, cherish and ultimately act "in the context of love in a non-exploitative manner" (p. 17).

Fear of being misrepresented as exploitative, unprofessional or possessing poor boundaries leads some to feel discomfort with identifying CYC practice as loving (Ranahan, 2000; Smith 2006). In contemplating the role of love in her own practice, Ranahan (2000) questions whether it is possible to have appropriate boundaries and also bring love into her practice as a CYC practitioner. Smith (2006) argues that fear is not a reason to cast aside love and sacrifice its presence in CYC relationships, "so long as we act justly in expressing that love, especially in our relationships with those less powerful than ourselves" (p. 13). To act justly requires that CYC practitioners are constantly mindful of their own thoughts, values and intentions, while also being aware and respectful of the boundaries between themselves and the children and youth they work with (Smith, 2006, p. 11). These boundaries are complex and need to "take into account the importance of honouring and preserving both our vital autonomy and our inextricable mutual interdependence" (Artz, 2000, p. 297). While enhancing one's connection to another, love perplexingly also supports the development of each person's individuality and independence (Maier, 1987). Love cannot grow in interactions where one party is intent on maintaining power over the other. Domination, ownership, possession and control are concepts that oppose love (Artz, 2000). CYC practitioners do not inherently possess authority, instead their authority is based on "the strength of [their] status as a beloved and admired model person" (Brendtro, 1990, p. 82) in the eyes of the children and youth they work with. The expression of love is beyond expectation, it is given freely regardless of a child's behaviour and achievements (Ranahan, 2000, para. 22). Love is a prerequisite of positive behaviour, and should never be withheld or used only to reward particular behaviours (Brendtro, 1990, p. 80). Love is "a process, a way of being, an expression that moves and shifts" (Ranahan, 2000, para. 22). It is not conditional or judgmental. It seeks to "understand each individual's subjective experience" (Ranahan, 2000, para. 22).

In the CYC field, love alone is "not enough" (Bettelheim, 1950, as cited in Maier, 1987, p. 38) to ensure positive outcomes for children and youth receiving support. Practitioners must also possess the appropriate knowledge of human development and be able to apply that knowledge in their everyday interactions with children (Maier, 1987, p. 38). Skott-Myhre and Skott-Myhre (2006) propose a definition of love in CYC that encompasses "the act of giving fully and completely of oneself without the worry that one would run out of oneself; with the knowledge that you are infinite in your creative capacity to produce yourself" (p. 197). With this understanding of love in practice, there should be no fear or uneasiness about bringing love into CYC. Love does not need to be viewed as separate or outside of professional practice; it can "co-exist" with professional CYC work (Thumbadoo, 2011, p.197). In the context of relational engagement and life-space intervention, which are central to the field, love complements CYC practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012; Ranahan, 2000; Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2007; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2011; Thumbadoo, 2011).

Love, Ethics, and Professional Practice

Recognizing that some understandings of professionalism hinder meaningful connection between caring professionals and the people they work with (Hargreaves, 2000; Klaver & Baart, 2011; Loreman, 2011; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012; Ranahan, 2000; Smith 2006), there is a clear need for ongoing discussion about what professional, ethical practice entails. Love as ethical engagement does not infer inappropriate, romantic relationships (Starratt, 1991) though, it does require engrossment and caring attention. Smith (2006), stresses that understandings of professionalism need to be based on the qualities required to complete one's job proficiently and ethically. Therefore, in fields where practitioners' roles involve supporting children and youth to grow "being professional requires that we engage with kids in very immediate ways in the mess and ambiguous reality of their life worlds" (Smith, 2006, p. 14) and any claim that it is necessary to disengage and distance oneself from another is in effect unprofessional. Reflective practice, and the ability to self-monitor and self-asses are at the heart of all ethical practice (Bellefeuille, McGrath & Jamieson, 2007, p. 723). Particular values matter less than one's awareness of their own values and the value systems that they operate within, and how each affect decision making and intervention. In relational work, objectivity is not possible because one's values are tied up with another's, and it is not possible to make an evaluation from an external viewpoint while concurrently being involved in the situation (Gharabaghi, 2008b, p. 190). In considering ethical practice and professional codes of conduct it is necessary to "question whether regulation, however perfect, can in fact bring about the kind of safety it is intended to" (Smith, 2006, p. 14), or whether it will ultimately hinder ethical practice. Each of the conversations about love that are taking place across the caring professions highlighted in this article contribute to a contemplative, reflective examination of a concept that has for too long lingered in the shadows. However, without an effort toward continuous reflection and re-evaluation, on an individual, intra- and inter-disciplinary level, love, like any other practice value risks being disregarded or manipulated to justify actions that may not be ethical. It is my hope that this article might act as a catalyst for further reflection (either individually or in a group) on the place of love in child and youth care and other professional caring contexts.

About the author

Jennifer Vincent has a Master's of Arts in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria, Canada. She has worked in Edmonton, Alberta as a behaviour consultant, supporting children with complex behavioural needs and their caregivers for the past five years. Her previous work experience in children's mental health, school based CYC and residential CYC has inspired her

interest in how love is conceptualised across the diverse professional setting where CYC is practised.

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