

TOWARDS A TRANSDISCIPLINARY MODEL WITHIN CHILD AND YOUTH RIGHTS EDUCATION

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1. TRANSDISCIPLINARY THINKING WITHIN CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATION

1. Within the literature of the social and traditional sciences there are growing epistemological and methodological trends towards transdisciplinarity. This chapter considers this evolution in the context of human rights education and stems from the notion that multi- and even interdisciplinary methods are no longer adequate to conceptualise the proliferation of new knowledge in this field. Its purpose is two-fold: firstly, to build the case for transdisciplinary thinking within the field of child and youth rights education, and secondly to offer one such heuristic model derived from a secondary analysis of the author's doctoral study of Canadian and Scottish approaches. As philosophers DELEUZE and GUATTARI suggest, the rhizome is a more appropriate metaphor to understand the immense number of possible interconnections and assemblages making up temporal reality. In principle, the rhizome is anti-hegemonic, is more concerned with space than of time, disables the formation of power centres and thus, will be drawn upon to reframe child rights teaching and learning.

Inspired by educators such as Brazilian EKIRIÉ, African-American women's scholar bell hooks, and US critical theorist GROUlx, this author discusses transdisciplinarity and human rights teaching as a transformative pedagogy concerning the kinds of knowledge which are at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines

¹ R.C. MITCHELL, 'Postmodern reflections on the UNCRC: Towards utilising Art. 42 as an international compliance indicator', (2005) 13 *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 315–331.

² G. DELEUZE and F. GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), also R. LOUIT, 'Incorporeal Part III: Rhizomatic Ontologies', (2003) *Reform Magazine*, ISSN 1445–7164.

and beyond all discipline such as NICOLESCU contends.² NICOLESCU's definition calls us to reconsider our perceptions of reality based upon what quantum physics has shown about the nature of the universe, and is one of the most widely referenced in this emergent discourse. He observes that multidisciplinary research concerns a topic, which may not be limited by one disciplinary perspective but whose goal nonetheless remains anchored within one disciplinary framework. While still concerned with one disciplinary framework, interdisciplinarity concerns the transfer of methods from one discipline to another. Its three defining degrees are concerned with levels of application, epistemology or the potential for generating completely new disciplines such as in the case of mathematical physics or computer art. Transdisciplinary research generally creates its own criteria and standards because of its unique, emergent qualities.³

Sociologists BECK and SZNAIDER have also observed the social sciences being reshaped by a "trans-disciplinary cosmopolitanism" and a resultant movement away from "methodological nationalism".⁴ In the same journal TURNER, who has previously argued for a distinct theory of human rights, links transdisciplinary cosmopolitanism with the theoretical tension between local and global expressions of citizenship. The latter, he claims, simply does not exist: "*Citizenship contrasts sharply with human rights*", TURNER argues, due to implicit obligations by the state upon "the individual to carry out various civic duties such as military service, or at the very least, gainful employment". He contends the emerging notion that physically and mentally disabled people share similar social and political benefits as other citizens creates a "lack of fit between duties and rights, for example in the case of children's rights.... This lack of fit in the case of disabled persons accounts for the fact that they are discriminated against and are so often treated as second-class citizens"; he observes.⁵ It is apparent, however, that such Enlightenment-era conservative notions of active citizenship being premised upon a dualism of "rights and responsibilities" are being challenged by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (or the CRC).

² While developmental psychologist J. PIAGET is widely credited with coining the term in 1970, the definition underpinning this chapter builds upon B. NICOLESCU's definition found within the International Center for Transdisciplinary Research and Studies in Paris, and his *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002).

³ W. RESSLER, 'Forging new paths: Transdisciplinarity in Universities', (2000) 53 *Wisenet Journal – Australia's Women in Science Inquiry Network*, 1–4, <<http://www.wisenet-australia.org/>>.

⁴ U. BECK and N. SZNAIDER, 'Unpacking cosmopolitanism for the social sciences: a research agenda', (2006) 57 *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1–23.

⁵ B. TURNER, 'Outline of a theory of human rights', (1993) 27 *Sociology*, 489–512.

⁶ B. TURNER, 'Classical sociology and cosmopolitanism: a critical defence of the social', (2006), (147) 57 *The British Journal of Sociology*, 133–151.

As TURNER suggests; the debate over emerging expressions of local and global citizenship is frequently being premised upon human rights pedagogies stemming from the cosmopolitan expression of children's rights. In a similar vein, Malawian legal scholar KAMCHELDZWA maintains that the African Charter on the Rights of the Child was not an expression of cultural relativity, neither was it designed to infringe upon the principle of universality of human rights. Instead, he argues, it was meant to be complimentary to the CRC, which is solely a set of "minimum standards".¹ However, to mitigate early concerns for infantilising children within Southern nations through the CRC implementation, UK women's scholar BURMAN encourages theorists and practitioners alike to engage in "disciplinary tourism" and experiment with ideas from outside western psychology. As feminists and child rights activists have rightly pointed out, BURMAN argues it would be "ironic" to dispense with the notion of individual citizens precisely when women and children were beginning to acquire hard-won rights there-by.²

Canadian sociologist STASINSKI argues that in contrast to the "bankruptcy" of domestic approaches to child citizenship and "empowerment rights", the larger children's rights movement offers an alternative image due to its synergy between central concepts of participation and protection. Once again, the strictly juridical and legalistic constraints upon emerging forms of citizenship are seen as shifting as the CRC becomes more fully applied in the cultural milieu and lived experiences of young people. Building upon these introductory theorists, the focus of the chapter moves now to consider more closely how transdisciplinary thinking might aid adults and young people within human rights educational contexts.

It is also built upon an explicit assumption that accurate knowledge of the CRC is a prerequisite to exercising its rights, understanding violations and monitoring its outcomes. Since these terms have been committed to by 192 nations³ the chapter is framed by CRC Article 42, arguably its least ambiguous text. The CRC states in Article

¹ G. KAMCHELDZWA, 'The African Child Charter: finally in force amidst enhanced justification', in P. VRIELINCK (ed.), *Universitizing Children's Rights - Collected Papers presented at the 5th International Interdisciplinary Course on Children's Rights*, (Belgium: University of Ghent, 2000), 362-383.

² See E. BURMAN, 'Local, global or globalised: Child development and international child rights legislation', (1996) 3 *Childhood*, 45-66; and V. PRAJAPATI, 'The infantilisation of the South and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child', (1998), in H. J. STEINER and P. AUSTIN (eds.), *International Human Rights in Context - Law, Politics, Morals*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 517-518.

³ E. BURMAN, 'Beyond the baby and the bathwater: Postdualistic developmental psychologies for diverse childhoods', (2001) 9 *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 5-22.

D. STASINSKI, 'The active child citizen: lessons from Canadian policy and the children's movement', (2002), p. 532) 6 *Citizenship Studies*, 507-538.

Office Of The High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Status of Ratification', (2016), retrieved 25 May 2016 from <https://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/discussion.htm>.

42 that, "States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike".

The argument for adopting a transdisciplinary approach within child and youth rights pedagogy and for considering CRC Article 42 as one such cross-cutting framework, are considered again in the following four sections. The first begins with a comparative overview of salient issues confounding Canadian child rights legislative, policy and research agendas through a rhizomatic, transdisciplinary lens. Secondly, a theoretical discussion relocating children's rights education in the larger discourse of human rights occurs. Thirdly, empirical support is offered from a selection of texts obtained through secondary analysis of existing qualitative data from the author's doctoral study. Finally, a key finding from this study suggesting that the CRC's drafters had conceived of Article 42 as a compliance indicator has shaped development of a heuristic model¹², reprinted here as a contribution towards transdisciplinarity within human rights education. The model is posited as the type of "transdisciplinary tool" and new "model of analysis" called for by educators GIROUX and STARIS GIROUX to promote active citizenship in democratic societies.¹³

2. COMPETING AND COMPARING CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP DISCOURSES

2. Rather than utilising a conceptual framework from the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights as many have done,¹⁴ this author views new opportunities for human rights education through the transdisciplinary implementation of the CRC. As many authors have noted, the CRC represents the most widespread expression of human rights in history spreading in the rapid, unpredictable fashion of the horticultural rhizome. For better and for worse, the CRC moved throughout the world in the 1990s, similar to the rhizome which grows at or just below the soil surface and is distinguishable from more common root systems by the presence of innumerable nodes such as those visible in the bamboo, iris, or spider plants.

¹² R.G. MITCHELL, *supra* (note 1), 325.

¹³ H. GIROUX and S. STARIS GIROUX, *Take Back Higher Education – Race, Youth and the Crisis of Democracy in the Post-Moral Rights Era*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 102.

¹⁴ See for example C. LÜHmannSCHEIT, 'International approaches to human rights education', (2002) 48 *International Review of Education*, 173–185; and J. A. LINDEMANN ALVAREZ, 'The Declaration of human rights in postmodernity', (2000) 22 *Human Rights Quarterly*, 478–500.

Diverse theorists within philosophy,¹⁶ psychiatry,¹⁷ nursing,¹⁸ and children's rights education¹⁹ have drawn upon this metaphor of the rhizome to discuss transdisciplinary theoretical developments in their respective fields. While beginning from the Canadian legal and educational contexts, the author observes that nations in both the developed (or minority) world and the developing (or majority) world will encounter similar concerns when teaching children's human rights. Building on a variety of disciplinary approaches in this way also permits the foundation of the growing Canadian controversy surrounding children's rights education to be made more explicit. Within this context, it is worth re-emphasising that many dozens of nations have signed and ratified the CRC, and notwithstanding the unprecedented cultural diversity, because of common texts many will encounter similar challenges within their own legal, educational and political systems. Nevertheless, due to an overall dearth of applied research in human rights education, misunderstandings frequently prevail and the fullest significance of the civil rights of young people is still at a fragile phase.²⁰

3. Up to this historical juncture, Canadians have been proud of their international reputation for human rights promotion at home and abroad. Indeed, it is part of the national identity that former Prime Minister Brian MULRONEY co-hosted the 1990 UN World Summit for Children, and similar to dozens of UN member states at that time, ratified the CRC within the following year. However, as the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004) passed by, frequent invitations from UN sources to develop and implement rights-based curricula were largely ignored across the country. As one consequence, in 2004 the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights began to investigate the growing lack of domestic compliance with the treaty's core principles and provisions.

Committee chair Senator Raynell ANDREYCHUK observes that the original intent was to examine how Canada could maximise the impact and application of the CRC. However, "in the course of the study the Committee became increasingly convinced that, *in both theory and in practice, children's rights in this country are not understood, or indeed provided*" notwithstanding the increasing rhetoric that "children are citizens

¹⁶ G. DELUZE and F. GUATTARI, *supra* (note 2).

¹⁷ C. JUNG, 1950–1979, *The Collected Works of C.G. JUNG* – 20 Vols., *Symbols of Transformation*, Bollingen Series XX, translated by R.F.C. HULL and edited by H. READ, M. FORDHAM, G. ADLER, and W.M. MCNAULIE (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956).

¹⁸ D. HOIJAES and D. CASTANHO, 'Rhizomatic thought' in 'nursing: an alternative' path for the development of the discipline', (2004) 5 *Nursing Philosophy*, 258–267.

¹⁹ J. ALLEN and J. MASON, 'Children's rights in schools: Power, assemblies and assemblies', (2004) 12 *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 123–138.

²⁰ P. DAVID, 'Implementing the rights of the child: Six reasons why the human rights of children remain a constant challenge', (2002) 48 *International Review of Education*, 259–263.

rights. The Reform Party went back to their ridings and addressed all local School Boards that said they would have the election and put pressure on them. Many didn't because of their inaccurate arguments."

In sharp contrast to Canada once again, a researcher and director for the non-governmental organisation Save the Children in Scotland discussed how history and culture have each intersected in the rights debate to impact new forms of citizenship teaching for children and young people. "I think it's a culture that inhibits rights... We don't really have rights... it's not really nice; it's a little bit pushy, it's a little bit demanding. It's rights and responsibilities. But what babies have responsibilities? Tell me. Dirty babies have the same rights as clean babies! Bad kids have the same rights as good kids! If you start making conditions and say that you only have rights if you're a nice kid... Our stance would be children have rights. That's it! They may learn about them better if you put them into a context that appreciates others' rights. Like all adults, the reality is that you still have your rights anyway!"

4.3. ROLE OF CRC REPORTING AND UN TREATY MONITORING

10. The current Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Professor DOEK spoke of innovative approaches towards rights-based teaching and power sharing that the Committee has encountered during their evaluation of hundreds of domestic reports under Article 4 to date. "In terms of the best kinds of schools, there are many good examples but one that stands out is those early learning centres in the north of Italy [Reggio Emilia]. They have innovative and very democratic styles of teaching, and of simply being with even very young learners... part of this new kind of rights culture also has to do with sharing power or perhaps losing a certain level of control, at least some of the control you were used to as a teacher."

Finally, during participant observations at the 2002 UN Special Session for Children, the author interviewed the director of a US-based NGO and a key participant in the Ad-Hoc Group during the CRC drafting. This authoritative key informant provided archival documents that supported her recollections of the lengthy negotiations leading to the exact wording for CRC Article 42.⁷¹

"It was 1987 and the NGO Ad-Hoc Group suggested we have a proposal about the implementation of the CRC... Article 42 did not have the word 'appropriate' in the First Reading and the word appears something like 45 times in the Convention... It

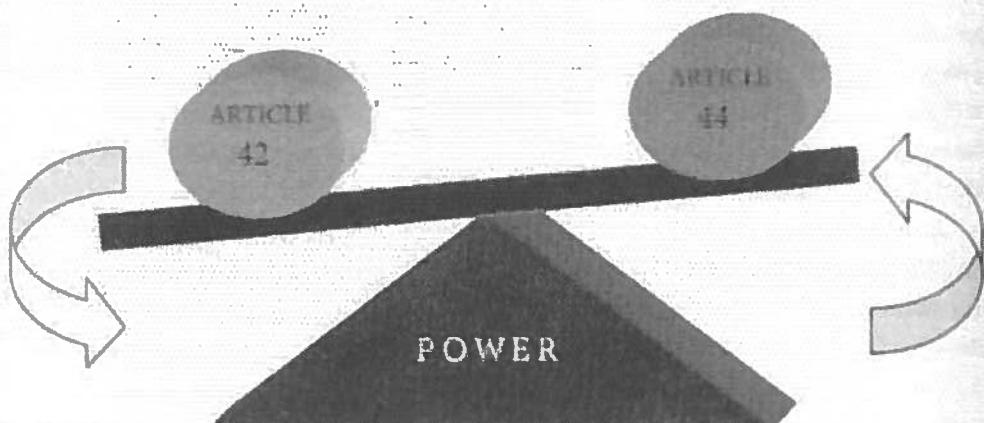
⁷¹ C. Peter COHEN and S. KIRKOURNE, "Jurisprudence of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: A Guide for Research and Analysis," [1998] 19 Michigan Journal of International Law, 633-728.

seemed that would be something you could measure if you were measuring the extent to which a country were living up to its obligations... if you are making the "principles and provisions" known. The opposite to that is Article 41 and making the reports widely available to the public... between the two it's like a see-saw.⁷²

These observations from a participant during the treaty's drafting in New York were deemed authoritative due to her role during a ten-year process of negotiation leading to adoption of the CRC at the UN in 1989. Her recollections and supporting archival materials became significant findings from the study. Recalling the relationship between basic human rights educational knowledge obliged within Article 42, and the periodic domestic reports required under Article 44, such a "minimal approach" to compliance to the treaty was deemed by CRC drafters to be capable of measurement by individuals, organisations and States Parties alike. Her argument that this approach to treaty compliance – simply letting educators, adults and young people have basic knowledge of the treaty's existence – was envisioned as the starting point necessary for "adults and children alike" to understand the CRC's core principles.

11. After a rigorous coding of 50 interview transcripts obtained during the study and a thorough analysis of research themes that each pointed towards institutional power relations, the following theoretical model was developed taking into account the monitoring and reporting "balance" described by PRICE COHEN.⁷³

Figure 1. Transdisciplinary CRC Model



⁷² For further analysis see R.C. MITCHELL, *supra* (note 1), 324-325.

⁷³ This *transdisciplinary child rights implementation model* is herewith represented for wider application with permission of the publishers.

Based upon an additional thematic analysis of fieldwork and data, the transdisciplinarity of the CRC is highlighted within the accompanying model, and is presented in support of introducing basic human rights knowledge within educational settings across disciplines, between disciplines and beyond all discipline. The dynamic process illustrated in the model also implies a type of rhizomatic balance for human rights educators accounting for Article 42's core "principles and provisions"—one that allows for both non-linearity and local contingency. In addition, recommendations contained within domestic child rights reports under Article 44 are highlighted. These systemic events may be represented within local educational contexts as illustrated by resting upon the fulcrum of interpersonal, national and international power relations. Such an approach to the macro- and micro-systemic features embedded within the CRC also takes into account the inherent agency of young people within such exchanges of power.

5. CONCLUSION

12. Inadequate Canadian efforts to educate children, young people and adults about the CRC are currently being reviewed by the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, and offer a critical context for this discussion. While numerous UK and European nations are considering the CRC within the pedagogy of citizenship, in Canada, the debate has stagnated and consequently few children or adults are receiving any basic education concerning the treaty.
13. The author has presented both theoretical and empirical arguments that children's rights are better understood as a transdisciplinary, rhizomatic expression of international human rights law, rather than any essentialised expression of "childhood". Such a contention contrasts the more traditional arborescent expressions of childhood and youth theorising within an emergent, discrete yet transdisciplinary rights discourse transcending most contemporary legal, educational, philosophical, political and sociological debates about the nature of young peoples' human rights. To support this stance, salient literature and selected findings from a secondary analysis of the author's doctoral study comparing CRC educational policies within Canada and Scotland were presented. As NICOLESCU suggests: "*For the moment, the term transdisciplinarity retains a certain pristine charm, mostly because it has not yet been corrupted by time. It has begun spreading around the globe, popping up in unexpected places, giving voice to a lively new concept that is not yet widely understood... It was coined to give expression to a need that was perceived – especially in the area of education*

—to celebrate the transgression of disciplinary boundaries, an act that far surpassed the multidisciplinary and the interdisciplinary approaches.”⁶²

This is a remarkably similar description of how the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child continues to move throughout the increasingly globalised community of nation states.

⁶² B. NICOLAESCU, *supra* (note 3), 3.

A. Alen, H. Bosly, M. De Bie, J. Vande Lanotte, F. Ang,
I. Delens-Ravier, M. Delplace, C. Herman, D. Reynaert,
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The UN Children's Rights Convention: theory meets practice



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