A Course-Based Qualitative Inquiry into the Potential Impact of the Bachelor of Child and Youth Care Program on Students' Future Parenting Styles

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Abstract: *This course-based qualitative study aims to explore what 4th-year Child and Youth Care students and recent graduates of the Bachelor of Child and Youth Care program at MacEwan University think about their likely parenting styles as a direct result of their Child and Youth Care educational experience. A thematic analysis of the data revealed four major themes: (1) the desire to be an authoritative parent, (2) courses, (3) themes and concepts that were meaningful, and (4) a better understanding of theories relevant to parenting and the need for self-reflection.*
Key Words*: child and youth care, discipline, parenting style, qualitative*

I. Introduction

There is a plethora of research that links healthy child development to effective parenting (Bornstein, 2002; Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). Developmental researchers have long studied the influence of parenting styles[1] (see Table 1 below) and approaches to discipline on child development (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000; Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride, 2003) and the extent to which children grow up to replicate the parenting style they experienced growing up (Crouter & Booth, 2003; The Urban Child Institute, 2014). In short, parents have an enormous influence over the developmental outcomes of their children. Thus, awareness of parenting styles is very important.

Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting

Scientific consensus suggests that intergenerational transmission of parenting styles from one generation to the next exist (Madden, et al., 2015). Intergenerational transmission of parenting can be defined as the transmission of parenting styles from generation to generation. Intergenerational transmission of parenting can be explained by a number of theories. For example, from a social learning theory perspective, the experiences children have growing up will greatly influence the attitudes, skills, and childrearing practices they will use with their own children (Tanaka, Kitamura, Chen, Murakami, &Goto, 2009). In other words, parenting patterns that are learned in childhood are emulated later in life when children become parents. Another theoretical perspective that offers an explanation of the intergenerational transmission of parenting is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973). According to attachment theory, a child forms an internal working model, which is a cognitive framework comprising mental representations for understanding the world, self, and others. Attachment theory also asserts that the way parents relate to their children is associated with the type of relationship they had with their own parents as a result of their experiences of responsiveness, rejection,and ambivalence during their childhood (Crittenden &Claussen, 2000).

What the Research Says

Though very few studies have examined the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles, a few have found that strict and harsh parenting in the first generation is associated with similar parenting practices by the next generation (Pears &Capaldi, 2001; Putallaz, Constanzo, Grimes, & Sherman, 1998; Simons, Conger, & Wu, 1991). The findings of two longitudinal studies across generations (Belsky, Jaffee, Sligo, Woodward, & Silva, 2005; Chen & Kaplan, 2001) suggest that children raised by supportive parents are more likely to demonstrate greater psychosocial competence and academic ability.

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[1]*Parenting style* is defined as a psychological construct that represent strategies parents use on their child (Spera, 2005).

Parenting Styles

Parenting style refers to patterns of childrearing that parents use to socialize and control their children. Arguably, the most influential researcher on parenting styles is clinical and developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind (1971). Baumirind categorized parents based on two dimensions, responsiveness (i.e., warmth) and demandingness (i.e., control)for which the majority of parents display one of three different parenting styles: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting or permissive parenting. Authoritative style has a high responsiveness and is highly demanding. Authoritarian style has low responsiveness and is highly demanding. Finally, permissive style, which is characterized by high responsiveness and demands little. Maccoby and Martin (1983) later expanded upon Baumrind's work and added the uninvolved/neglectful style. For the purpose of this course-based study, we adopted the following framework (see Table 1) to describe the four dominant styles of parenting (Plotnik&Kouyoumdjian, 2010).

Table 1. Parenting Styles

Authoritarian Parenting	Authoritative Parenting
Authoritarian parenting occurs where parents establish rules and expect that children will follow them without exception. Children have little to no involvement in problem-solving challenges or obstacles. Instead, parents expect that children will follow all of the rules all the time. If children challenge the rules or ask why, they are usually told, "Because I said so." Children are not usually given the reasons for the rules and there is little room for negotiation. Authoritarian parents may use punishments instead of consequences.	Authoritative parents have rules that children are expected to follow; however, they allow some exceptions to the rules. They often tell children the reasons for the rules, and they are more willing to consider a child's feelings when setting limits. Authoritative parents tend to use consequences instead of punishments. They also use more positive consequences to reinforce good behaviors and may be more willing than authoritarian parents to use reward systems and praise.
Permissive Parenting	**Uninvolved Parenting**
Permissive parents don't offer much discipline. They tend to be lenient and may only step in when there is a serious problem. There may be few consequences for misbehavior because parents have an expectation that"kids will be kids." Permissive parents may take on more of a friend role than a parent role. They may encourage their children to talk with them about their problems but may not discourage a lot of bad behaviors.	Uninvolved parents tend to be neglectful. They often fail to meet their children's basic needs and may expect children to raise themselves. Sometimes this is due to a parent's mental health issues or substance abuse problems. They may also lack knowledge about parenting and child development, or they may feel overwhelmed by life's problems. Uninvolved parents tend to have little knowledge of what their children are doing. There tend to be few, if any, rules or expectations. Children may not receive any nurturing or guidance, and they lack much needed parental attention

Child and Youth Care Education

Central to the educational process employed in a child and youth care (CYC) context is self-awareness, which serve to promote and gain insight into one's personal history. Practitioners' self-awareness involves knowledge of their own developmental history and the potential effects of their background on their work with children, youth, and families. Self-awareness, therefore, requires gaining insight into the developmental impacts of caregivers and their parenting practices.

Undergraduate Course-Based Research: A Pedagogical Tool to Foster Criticality, Reflectivity, and Praxis

The Bachelor of Child and Youth Care program at MacEwan University is continuously searching for new pedagogical approaches to foster criticality, reflectivity, and praxis as integral components of the overall student educational experience. As such, the design and implementation of a course-based approach, in contrast to the traditional didactic approach to research-methods instruction, offers fourth-year undergraduate students the opportunity to master introductory research skills by conceptualizing, designing, administering, and showcasing small minimum-risk research projects under the guidance and supervision of the course instructor—commonly, a professor with an extensive background in research and teaching.

Use of course-based research in higher education has soared in recent years (Allyn, 2013; Bellefeuille, Ekdahl, Kent, &Kluczny, 2014; Harrison, Dunbar, Ratmansky, Boyd, &Lopatto, 2010). The benefits derived from a course-based approach to teaching research methods for Child and Youth Care (CYC) students are significant. First, there is value in providing students with authentic learning experiences that enhance the transfer of knowledge obtained in formal education to practice. Past students have reported that their engagement in course-based research has enabled them to expand their depth of scientific knowledge by adopting new methods of creative inquiry. Second, course-based research offers students the opportunity to work with instructors in a relationship characterized by mentoring, which results in a greater number of students who express interest in advancing to graduate studies. Third, the results of course-based research can sometimes be published in peer-reviewed journals and online open-access portals, and thus contributes to the discipline's knowledge base.

Ethical approval required to enable students to conduct course-based research projects is granted to the course instructor by the university's research ethics board (REB). Student research groups are then required to complete an REB application form for each course-based research project undertaken in the class, which is then reviewed by the course instructor and a sub-REB committee to ensure each course-based research project is completed and is in compliance with the ethics review requirements of the university.

Research Design

This course-based study was conducted according to the qualitative research method, which is an interpretive approach. A qualitative research design is especially suited to CYC investigations that aim to deepen understanding of the "lived" experiences of research participants, and it requires the researcher to approach the study with a commitment to the participants' perceptions of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2003).

Research Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm, with respect to ontology and epistemology,articulates the view that reality is subjective and that its perception differs from person to person (Creswell, 2003). The core underlying assumption of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is a social construction and that "meaning-making" is rooted in social relationships and contextualized within one's social and cultural environment. This is congruent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions that inform CYC relational practice (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this course-based qualitative study was to explore how CYC students think about their future parenting styles as a result of their CYC educational experience.

Research Questions

The course-based study aimed to explore participants' awareness, perceptions, and attitudes toward parenting styles in relation to the participants' parenting experiences. The following four questions guided the study:
1. Do you thinkyou will use a different parenting stylethan your parents? If so, describe the parenting style you experienced while growing-up and what,specifically, you would change or do differently.
2. What specific courses, theories, or key concepts and ideas (see list below) do you feel had an impact on how you might parent differently? Please explain. Use the back of the page if you need more space. Also,the list below is not exhaustive, so feel free to identify any other theories or concepts that have had an impact on you.
3. In addition to these three questions, is there anything else about the CYC program you feel has influenced how you think about parenting and how you will approach parenting?

Sample Population

A non-probability, convenient sampling strategy was used to recruit participants for this course-based study. Non-probability sampling represents a range of sampling techniques that help researchers select units from a population that can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon [of] the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). A total of 15, 4th-year CYC students and recent graduates of the program took part in the course-based study.

Data Collection

Given the interpretive nature of the course-based study, an open-ended survey was used as the primary data collection strategy. As Patton (1997) states, research methods should flow logically from the nature of the research questions raised.

II. Data Analysis

In order to identify participants' dominant perceptions in the data, this research focused on identifying themes within the data. We decided that the most appropriate method of analysis was thematic analysis. The essentialist method of Braun and Clark (2006) was selected to guide data analysis. The essentialist method is an inductive, "bottom-up," data-driven approach that allows themes to emerge from the data rather than from a preconceived theoretical position. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a series of six phases through which researchers must pass in order to produce a thematic analysis. These include: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing a report. This process provided us with a well-defined explanation of the

process of thematic analysisand how it is carried out whilst maintaining the tie to our overall epistemological position.

III. Results

The thematic analysis process we applied to the data revealed four major themes: (1) the desire to be an authoritative parent, (2) courses, (3) meaningful themes and concepts, and (4) a better understanding of theories relevant to parenting and the need for self-reflection.

Authoritative Parenting

The dominant theme that emerged was the desire of participants to parent with an authoritative parenting style, despite the fact that many participants did not experience that parenting style while growing up. The authoritarian parenting style appeared to be the dominant parenting style experienced by most participants. Those that said they experienced authoritative parenting growing up and would maintain that form of parenting stated that they would make slight changes, such as focusing on relationships rather than rules, maintaining boundaries, sibling equality, avoiding the use of physical punishments, and promoting communication.

Courses, Themes, and Concepts

Participants identified several specific courses and key concepts covered in a variety of courses that influenced their desire to adopt an authoritative parenting style. These included the (1) The Family Dynamics course, which focused on the family systems;(2) the Life Span Development course, which covered the stages of development a person goes through from birth to death;(3) the Abuse and Neglect class, whichexamined the implications, indicators, and symptoms of various forms of abuse and neglect of young people; and (4) the Substance Abuse class, whichexplored the effects various substances have on a person and the role they can play in individuals' relationships. The key concepts included (1) attachment theory, which addressed four major areas of attachment, (2)development theory, which identified areas of development during the lifespan and how social interactions and age play a role in how and when one develops and progresses in life, (3) ecological theory, whichlooked at how various systems, such as family, friends, community, school, and society, influence an individual;(4) the concept ofstrength-based practice;and (5) the concept of relational-centred practice.

Better Understanding of Theories in Relation to Parenting

The majority of participants talked about the link between theories addressed in the program and their application to parenting styles and healthy child development. The importance of seeking to be understanding, rather than controlling,and recognizing the importance of being relational rather than domineering,and the importance of open communication and honesty were identified by participants as crucial to creating healthy bonds with their children.

Self-Reflection

Finally, the majority of participants mentioned the importance of being self-aware, which was a major component of their CYC educational experience. They talked about the development of their capacity to reflect critically on their past parental experiences and to apply their learning to choices abouthow they hoped to parent effectively in future. They shared many personal insights,during the course of their CYC education, regardingthe desire to becoming more self-aware of their personal parenting histories and how they influenced their development.

IV. Discussion

In this course-based study we investigated the relationship between CYC education and CYC 4th-year students and recent CYC graduates' perceptions of how they will choose to parent in future. The results of this course-based inquiry clearly highlighted the potentialimpact that CYC education will have on how CYC graduates will choose to parent. The course-based study's results indicate that CYC education results inmore than the development of practice skills for working with vulnerable youth and families; in addition, CYC education makes a very personal impact on how graduates of the program will undertake parenting.

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