Improving Educational Experiences for Children in Our Care: An Ethic of Hospitality

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Abstract

The number of children in care in Canada is at epic proportions. Children in care perform at lower rates academically and have far lower graduation rates than children not in care. As children in care enter our schools at increasing rates and experience poor school success, it is of dire importance to understand how to better support these children. Drawn from a larger study seeking to improve systems change for children in care, this aspect of

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the study focused on school leaders' strategies for improving the experiences of children in care in their schools. Using Derrida's and Ruitenberg's articulations of an ethic of hospitality, we will illustrate participants' experiences and argue for the need for the education system to more justly engage in ethical relations with children, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Keywords: children in care, foster care, ethical engagements, hospitality

Résumé

Au Canada, le nombre d'enfants placés atteint des sommets. Ces enfants obtiennent des résultats scolaires et des taux de diplomation beaucoup plus faibles que les enfants non placés. Alors que les enfants placés entrent dans nos écoles à un rythme croissant et qu'ils obtiennent de mauvais résultats scolaires, il devient urgent de comprendre comment mieux les soutenir. L'aspect présenté dans cet article, extrait d'une étude plus vaste visant à présenter des recommandations pour la transformation des systèmes pour les enfants placés, se concentre sur les stratégies employées par les intervenants en milieu éducatif pour améliorer l'expérience vécue par ces enfants placés dans leurs écoles. En nous basant sur le concept de l'éthique de l'hospitalité de Derrida et Ruitenberg, nous illustrons les expériences des participants et plaidons pour que le système d'éducation s'engage à juste titre dans des relations éthiques avec les enfants, en particulier avec les plus vulnérables.

Mots-clés : enfants placés, famille d'accueil, engagements éthiques, hospitalité

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Introduction

Children—those below the age of 18—are indeed some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Although technically protected under numerous policies, state laws, and international agreements, such as the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the realities of protecting and caring for children often fall drastically short of the ideals. For example, Canada is often ranked highly in the world for various measures of quality of life, yet the country has a shameful record when it comes to caring for its children. Canada ranks 25th out of 41 nations in caring for children, with particularly poor rankings in child poverty, well-being, food security, and inclusivity (UNICEF, 2017). Moreover, Canada has the highest rates of children in care in the world (Brownell & McMurtry, 2015). The rates of the displacement of children from their homes are a national disgrace. These numbers are most drastic in the province of Manitoba, where there are currently over 10,000 children in care of the state; and although Indigenous[1] children make up about 25% of Manitoba's child population, almost 90% of children in care in Manitoba are Indigenous (Brownell et al., 2015). Moreover, although these statistics are known and identified as problematic, the rates of Indigenous children in care continue to increase (Jones et al., 2015).

In addition to displacement from their homes and communities, children in care are often dispossessed by the school systems that are meant to support them. The research consistently demonstrates that children in care experience poor educational outcomes, including high dropout rates, low graduation rates, lower academic achievement, behavioural problems, and lower participation in post-secondary education institutions (Fernandez, 2008; Kufeldt et al., 2003; Brownell et al., 2015; Mitic & Rimer, 2002; Office of the British Columbia Health Officer, 2007; Piescher et al., 2014, Romano, 2015; Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009; Smithgall et al., 2004; Trout et al., 2008). The comprehensive Manitoba Centre for Health Policy report (Brownell et al., 2015) focused on the academic

1 We use the term Indigenous here to reflect the language of the Brownlee report. In the Canadian context, Indigenous is a term used by the Canadian government to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We understand and regret how this term fails to recognize the multiplicity of languages, regions, bands, and practices of Indigenous peoples in Canada and we understand that when referring to individual people of indigeneity, it is always most appropriate to recognize the specific Nation, tribe, or band from which people originate and by which they self-identity.

achievement of children in care in Manitoba and found that children in care demonstrated far lower rates of readiness for school (47% compared to 76% of children not in care), competencies in math in Grade 3 (49% to 80% of children not in care), and reading and writing achievement in Grade 8 (48% to 85% of children not in care). Ultimately, the report found that children in care have incredibly low graduation rates. Whereas Grade 12 graduation rates hover around 90% for most young people in Manitoba, for children who are or who have been in care, that rate is a shocking 33%. In other words, whereas most children who have not been in care graduate from high school, only about one-third of children who have been in care experience that same success.

We know that the causes for children being in care are complex, but also reflective of larger systemic problems. In the Canadian context, high rates of children in care are due, in large part, to the complicated and pervasive historic and current policies that systemically maintain and magnify inequities between Indigenous children (and their families) on and off reserve (Trocmé et al., 2004). We know that children continue to suffer effects of intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) and we also know that although the child welfare system is important for protecting abused and neglected children, its mandate concerns the protection of children, which often leads to the removal of children from their homes. The mandate of protection, however, does not attend to systemic racism and precarious living conditions (such as poverty, insufficient and unsafe housing, and food and water insecurity) that often underlie the conditions in which families live (Brownell et al., 2015). These are complicated issues that require public and political will, as well as thorough legislation and policy revisions. In the meantime, children continue to be displaced from their homes and communities in the tens of thousands across the country, and although schools could be a place for stability and engagement, schools often become places where students are dispossessed by systems that offer too few resources and insufficient supports to deal with issues specific to their lives.

Purpose

Although we know that children in care experience less educational success than children who are not in care, the research also demonstrates that the outcomes for children are better when they can maintain school stability (Connelly & Chakrabarti, 2008) and relational

continuity (Munro & Hardy, 2006). It may sound simplistic to say that when children can stay in the same school for longer periods, and when they have positive relationships with others in their schools, they are more likely to do better in school. Yet, based on the findings of the Brownell report, we evidently do not fully understand how to improve these two conditions for children in care. Drawn from a larger research project, this particular aspect of the study aimed to document school leaders' perspectives on ways in which they support children in care in their schools.

Due to some children's "violently lived realities" (Todd, 2003, p. 1), we consider an ethical orientation that might better respond to those most vulnerable. Rather than detailing formulaic procedures and references to policy, our interviews with school leaders elicited an ethical orientation to working with children in care. Informed by the philosophers Derrida and Levinas, and more contemporaneously by Sharon Todd and Claudia Ruitenberg, we will enliven their articulations of ethics with the experiences of the participants in order to illustrate and argue for how education might more justly engage in ethical relations with children who are often the most vulnerable.

An Ethic of Hospitality

This study is informed by an ethics that is premised on ethical engagements between educators and children; a relation not premised on knowledge transmission, but rather premised on dialogue, listening, and learning from the Other (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Todd, 2003). Thus, an ethical encounter with the Other maintains a respect for the heterogeneity of the Other; resisting universal approaches of engagement and instead appreciating uncertainty and undecideability. A key philosophical concept used to engage the data and our theorizing is that of an ethic of hospitality, as informed by Derrida and Levinas, and more fully described in relation to education by Claudia Ruitenberg (2011, 2015) and Sharon Todd (2015). As Todd (2015) writes, "The ethical, for both Derrida and Levinas, is rooted in an unlimited responsibility to the Other that finds its best expression in the figure of hospitality" (p. 111). At first glance, this may appear as a seemingly simple concept, in that hospitality could be understood as a gracious host receiving a guest; however, the philosophical sense of this metaphor is more demanding. For example, it is important to note that Derrida's hospitality is an infinite gift without an exchange—there

is no expectation of a gift in return or of reciprocation (Oliver, 2015; Ruitenberg, 2015). So, although the host welcomes the guest, they do so with the awareness that, "the guest may change the space into which he or she is received (Ruitenberg, 2011, p. 32). In other words, rather than simply including the guest in the space, the host expects that the space may indeed be required to change in order to properly welcome the guest. The relationship between the guest and host is asymmetrical in that the comfort of the host is of no concern—or, as Ruitenberg (2011) bluntly explains, whether or not the host "feels comfortable in [the] presence of the guest is irrelevant" (p. 32).

Importantly, an ethic of hospitality is both an unlimited responsibility to the Other, yet impossible to fulfill. It is "a demand for openness to the arrival of something and someone we cannot foresee; a demand that is impossible to fulfill, but that confronts all of our decisions and actions" (Ruitenberg, 2011, p. 33). The expectation is that the host will welcome the guest without reservation and privilege the guest's comfort and needs over the host's. Hospitality is an "unconditional gift" that demands everything, while knowing that what one can offer can never be fully adequate. Importantly, there is a much more relational view of subjectivity in this concept, so much so that it is the ethical relation between the guest and the host that allows each to be "seen." Thus, to move to an educational context, the welcome of the child is an enduring responsibility in order for the guest to be seen in the world.

Methods and Data Sources

This study is drawn from a larger Partnership Development Research Project funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), in which our research team is exploring systems change. Specifically, we are concerned with how the education and child welfare systems, along with parents and family members, community-based service organizations, advocacy groups, and youth mentors, can collaborate to improve educational outcomes for children in care. For this particular aspect of the project, we interviewed 14 school leaders, including principals, vice-principals, support teachers, and classroom teachers, all who identified as having an active interest in supporting children in care. These leaders were drawn from four schools in the partnering

school district, represented kindergarten to Grade 12 classrooms,[2] and had large percentages (about 10%) of children in care in their schools. During the interviews, participants were asked to share the strategies that they enlist and the barriers they encounter when supporting children in care, and were encouraged to provide illustrative examples where possible.

During the analysis an open-coding approach was used to analyze the data, seeking concepts and then categorizing these concepts into an analytic framework. This process was reiterative, in that there were numerous rounds of reading and recoding transcripts, and then reconsidering and re-categorizing the data until the researchers were satisfied that the categories adequately reflected key themes in the data. The concepts and categories were then considered hermeneutically, seeking underlying discourses and theories implicit in the participants' discourse, and putting these into a "dialogic encounter" (Schwandt, 2003, p. 292) with philosophical concepts. Here we will use illustrative quotes to represent common ideas across the interviews that might inform others' work with children in care in our schools. By putting the data in conversation with theories of ethical engagements, we will illustrate that the work with children in care is more than just a list of strategies employed by school leaders, and is reflective of a larger ethical commitment and engagement. We argue that the strategies enlisted by the educators—their efforts and struggles, theorizations and reflections—illustrate the ethical engagement that is possible, but also that is required when working with children, especially those most vulnerable. Thus, through these educators' insights, we are able to illustrate the spaces of possibility for education premised on an ethic of hospitality.

2 Participants were drawn from each of the four partner schools, which were two early years (kindergarten to Grade 4) schools, one kindergarten to Grade 8 school, and two senior years (Grades 9–12) schools. Of the 14 people interviewed, four participants were principals, three were vice-principals, five were support teachers, and two were classroom teachers. Interviews were conducted individually, or in some cases, where a participant might have worked closely with a colleague, the interviews were conducted in pairs. In total, 10 interviews were conducted; five individual interviews were with those who indicated they wanted to be interviewed with a collegial counterpart, for example a principal and vice-principal or a support teacher and a classroom teacher.

Hospitality: Opening the Door

There were innumerable ways in which the educators we interviewed provided care, resources, and supports for children in care, often illustrating their efforts with emotional stories of children's lives. The particular strategies employed sometimes varied by school and grade level, school context, particular children, and so on. It was interesting how often participants qualified their responses to questions about the strategies they used to support children in care by saying things like, "well, similarly to what we want for all of our children," or "not just for kids in care, but for all of our kids." There was an emphasis on developing relationships of safety and trust for all of their students. However, what became apparent, and what is not easily refined into policy or protocols, was a guiding or underlying ethic that seemed to inform the educators' decision making. This is not to say that this ethical ideal was always articulated or even realized. As we will see, and as those who work in schools know, there are often conflicting and complex circumstances that influence decisions. In addition, and as will be made more clear, the ethic of hospitality, although necessary, it is also impossible. While the ethical engagement with the Other is an infinite responsibility, there are material realities that come into play when we attempt to live together (Oliver, 2012). What is important for our discussion here is to illustrate the participants' attempts and actions, but to also articulate the ethical demand that seemingly guided much of their decision making, and moreover, that could be used as a way to inform other decision makers in school settings.

In what follows, we will illustrate both the actions taken by school leaders, philosophical readings of these actions, and the theoretical possibilities that are enlivened by and central to working with children in care—and indeed, central to our work in schools.

Who Is the Guest? Reconceptualizing Understandings of the "Child"

Postmodern and critical theorizations, often influenced by continental philosophers, have led to a reconceptualization of the subject. For understandings of children and childhood, this means that the historical or traditional "othering" of children (Cannella, 1997; Bloch & Popkewitz, 2000) and the pathologizing of them (Heydon & Iannaci, 2009) has been

critiqued and problematized. To be clear, this "othering" of children refers to the ways in which children have been historically marginalized and minimized, constructed as less-er-than, inferior, and submissive to adults (Bloch, 1992; Burman, 1994; Cannella, 2000; Christensen & Prout, 2005). The reconceptualist movement acknowledges philosophical influences and postmodern shifts, understanding the social phenomenon of childhood, and of children who are understood as subjects, co-constructing knowledge, identity, and culture (Dahlberg et al., 2007). This way of thinking about and relating to/with children is an important shift in thinking about children and adults' relationships with them, but in this case, it has particular implications for thinking about children in care. For example, consider Adam, a vice-principal of a high school, who explains the shift in thinking about kids:

> We have really been trying to humanizing our language… Look, we did this when we reframed how we talk about kids with special needs: they are not "autistic kids"…they are kids *first*. And when we talk about them, we try to do that in an affirming, positive way.

Adam—like many of those we interviewed—spoke of being careful and more conscious of how we think about and describe children in care.

Similarly, Bernice (a principal of a small early years school) described her concern about "children in care" or "kids in care" becoming a label that overshadows individuality and stigmatizes the student. As Butler (1993) argued through theories of interpellation, the subject "comes into life by being hailed or called" (p. 123). Thus, language matters: language calls the subject into being and subordinates the subject in particular ways. Participants explained how they encouraged and modelled for their staff the use of "strengths-based" and "positive" language to describe children. They seemed to recognize that children's identities are socially constructed and that these constructions induce both a social and a psychic effect. In other words, the language used to name, categorize, or label children is important, not only for the child and her/his self-identity, but also for how others come to perceive her/him.

Glenda, a classroom support teacher, described how she worked with a teacher to help him change the way he was thinking about a child who was exhibiting what the teacher called "bad behaviour." Glenda shared her wondering about this aloud in in our interview by asking, "How can we think about these things, like 'bad behaviour,' a little differently? How can we reframe that to think about what is behind those behaviours?

How can we think about that child from a different lens?" Here, we see in Glenda's response an attempt to resist locating the "bad behaviour" within the child, to refuse the simplistic categorization, and instead consider the factors that might be resulting in difficult or concerning behaviours. Such critical reflection considers not how to "fix" the behaviour, but explores why the behaviour is occurring and that the behaviour might be signalling a particular form of communication or a need of the child (Janzen & Schwartz, 2018). Pathologizing children's behaviours as a problem with/of the child, can dehumanize the child and perpetuate an "othering" of them (Heydon & Iannacci, 2009).

Bernice spoke to the "othering" that can occur for children in care, by the nature of their status and label of being "in care." She said:

> I've been to so many meetings where the foster parents talk about children in care and say things about them that they would never say if that was their biological child… *And*, we also know that the system is set up so that the higher the needs of the kid, the more money you get… It's not fair to kids.

Because the foster family receives funding relative to the level of "need" of the child, the child becomes objectified and their experiences and subsequent needs are represented in funding formulas and dollar amounts. Thus, as Baker (2002) argues, the "deficiencies" and needs of the child "are constituted through current social relations and institutional structures and area not objectively 'existing in' persons" (p. 688). Children's status of being "in care" is a social construct that signals deficits and effectively dehumanizes children. It is this dehumanization that makes some lives more worthy than others, some lives more human, and some lives more grieveable (Butler, 2004).

The school leaders spoke of efforts to shift understandings of children in care and to promote a shared responsibility for them. Numerous participants referred to a guest speaker that they had heard at one of their professional development days who had been in care most of his life. The guest urged the audience to reconsider the language of "those kids" and the active marginalization that this language activates. Rather, he encouraged the audience to consider children in care as "children in *our* care," reminding the audience that children are the responsibility of our nation and of all of us who reside in it. One early years principal, Cindy, described her recollection of this event and said that she often reminds her staff that "it's not *those* kids in care—they are *our* children, children in *our* care. All of our kids are all of our responsibility all of the time." This shift helped to

develop an understanding of the vulnerability of children and the shared responsibility for them. The recognition of the vulnerability of children in care is a requisite for an ethical engagement with them; it is "a precondition for humanization" (Butler, 2004, p. 43).

Cindy spoke of the importance of sharing children's stories with the staff in order to humanize and recognize the vulnerability of children in care. She told the story of a Grade 1 student named Sophia:

> Sophia and I were having lunch in my office and she pointed to a picture on my shelf and said, "Is that you? You're a mom?" and I said, "Yeah, that's me and my daughter." And she looked at me again, and after a while she asked, "Do you still have that kid?"

This question from a 6-year-old child may be striking to some, but illustrates the precarity of relationships, particularly family relationships, that many children in care experience. Cindy explained how sharing stories like these with her staff (including teachers, educational assistants, and secretaries), helps them to better understand the perspectives and experiences of children in care. As Diane (an early years learning support teacher) explained, "There are a lot of teachers who might not understand these kids' experiences; having grown up in a nuclear family without any involvement with the foster care system, it might seem very foreign and strange." In addition to sharing stories, the school leaders also described hosting book clubs and watching films in which real and fictional accounts of children in care were depicted, hosting guest speakers who talked about their experiences of being in care, and having guest speakers from agencies who support children in care. Through various professional development opportunities, the teachers and staff learned about resilience, attachment, and trauma. They learned about the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the effects of intergenerational trauma in order to frame the psychological, social, and emotional effects of children's experiences of family disruption within the colonial structures and systemic racism towards Indigenous peoples.

In these efforts to reconceptualize "the student" and the "child in care" to that of a humanized subject, it is helpful to draw from the philosophical perspective of an ethic of hospitality, theorizing the student as a "guest." Shifting the traditional host–guest relationship to one that is more ethical requires a "radically decentered" position (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 14) of the host (teacher). It is important to note that from a philosophical

perspective, the Other takes on a different meaning, not necessarily a characteristic indicating oppression, but rather, as Todd (2003) interprets Levinas, the Other "signals a radical alterity that is independent of social forces" (p. 2). The Other here is a recognition of difference and of unknowability, requiring an attentiveness to alterity and a response that is ethical (Todd, 2003). The teacher's response to the Other is not premised on fully knowing the Other or assuming that one can be known, but rather the relation is premised on responding to the Other with attentiveness and with a respect for preserving the alterity of the Other (Ruitenberg, 2015; Todd, 2003). It is an "unapologetically asymmetrical" relation (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 40), where "the ethic of hospitality is all about the guest, about giving place to a guest" (p. 14). We see this decentering of the teaching subject and a reorientation to the guest—to the child in care—in the efforts of the participants, illustrating the relationship between the host and the guest is an economy of excess (Ruitenberg, 2015). An economy of excess, as Ruitenberg explains, is one in which the terms of the relationship are always unequal, in that the host is always expected to satisfy the guest's demands without an expectation of return or satisfaction. The relationship is excessive in that it is unreasonable to satisfy the terms of the relationship, yet achievement of that goal is not the point.

"Everyday Responses": Hospitality as Gesture

Children who are in care often experience relationships as unstable, tumultuous, and uncertain. The participants were ardent about the importance of forming, extending and maintaining positive relationships with the children in care, concerned that the children felt "connected," "safe," "loved," "wanted," and "a sense of belonging." In early years, caring might look like a child coming to see the principal for a Band-Aid. Bernice explained:

> I have a group of kids that I call my Band-Aid kids. On the first day back after the break one of the kids came for—we counted—nine Band-Aids that day! Does she need nine Band-Aids? No, but we've been away [on the break] and she wants to make sure we're still here.

Bernice's story illustrates both the social nature of the pedagogical encounter but also the vulnerability of this relation. Todd (2003) explains that the "self–Other relationship is

crucial in understanding how profoundly teachers can be implicated in the lives of their students—often unwittingly, of course—and it enables teachers to reflect on how their everyday responses are always already ethically laden" (p. 38). It is in these "everyday responses" that we see the multitude of ways in which these school leaders attempted to engage in an ethical relation with the Other. Again, these were not prescriptive—"not cookie cutter"—responses, but rather, were dependent on the particularities of the encounter.

Although Bernice described her actions—giving Band-Aids and having lunch with students, to name a few—as "the little things," Todd (2003) reminds us that these everyday responses are of ethical importance. Everyday responses are the gestures of hospitality; potentially unperceived by the guest, enacted without certainty of outcomes, offered without the expectation of reciprocity (Ruitenberg, 2015). Other everyday efforts and strategies included the expectation that every person on staff knew every child in care's name. The participants believed it was important that children knew that there were numerous adults (in addition to their classroom teachers) with whom kids could go "check in with" or "drop by before school." The participants described providing basic needs, such as food, bus tickets, and clothes; and often ensured children in care had their not-so-basic needs fulfilled, like a birthday cake for a Grade 1 girl who had never had a party, or a Halloween costume for the child whose family would not be able to get one. Some of these gestures also involved removing the financial barriers for extracurricular activities such as the school football team, as well as organizing and/or providing transportation for the youth to attend these activities. At times, these responses required advocating with social workers for additional funds, enrollment in camps, and referrals to therapists and other specialists. Importantly, gestures of hospitality are offered not because school leaders see themselves as virtuous, but rather because they perceived these actions as a responsibility to the Other.

In order to welcome the guest into the school, and reflective of a host's responsibility, these educators also recognized the importance of acknowledging and welcoming not just the child, but also welcoming the important others in the child's life. The participants were cognizant of the importance of the relationships with the child's foster family, social worker(s), biological family members, and even with other students. Again, this looked different in different schools, but the shared emphasis on having positive relationships with the children in care—and with others in their lives—was pervasive. The

participants explained various processes and strategies for reaching out to social workers, foster families, and biological families to ensure that they were invited to school events, concerts, and parent conference meetings. They spoke of the importance of taking photographs of the children and of creating memory books so that, especially in the event that they had to move to another school, students could take artifacts representing their experiences and relationships from their time at the school.

As Levinas has helped us to understand, our responsibility for the Other is unavoidable and unquestionable and we see this ethical imperative being lived out in "the particularities of the pedagogical encounter, the relationships between the teachers and the students" (Todd, 2003, p. 37). As described, the uncertainty of the outcome of these gestures of hospitality is central to these ethical relations. Todd (2003) explains this by stating, "if such uncertainty is inevitable, then the quality of response to the Other is rooted in shifting social relations rather than in solely abstract adherence to ethical rules or principles" (p. 37). This means that educators must engage responsively with the Other, resisting predetermined programs or processes, while recognizing the importance of attending to "the relation between the self and the Other" (p. 38). The educators understood that these relationships and engagements could not be predetermined. In fact, there was a resistance to developing policies or procedures for responding to children in care. As Jason, an early years learning support teacher, explained, "It's a tough thing because we want consistency, but we don't want rules over common sense either. We want to have some flexibility—and use judgement." The relation that the self has with the Other "signals the importance of sociality and ethicality to education" (Todd, 2003, p. 38)—not something that can be scripted in advance.

A sense of belonging is crucial for students to feel as though they have a place in the school but also in the world; that they are able to "develop and sustain the ability to imagine that the future will contain something more than, or something different from the present as they know it" (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 16). It is obvious to see the magnified importance of this sense of belonging for children in care; knowing that they have a place where they can be seen, a place to exist in the world (Biesta, 2017). In recognizing the importance of the child's belonging, the participants spoke to the importance of attending to children who have to move from the school. When children in care leave their school it is often because of yet another placement change, or perhaps reunification with their families. In any case, it is another disruption in their already disrupted lives. Although

the school leaders had a multitude of stories of their advocacy work and of the resources that they allocated so that children could stay in their school, they also facilitated processes to support children who had to leave the school. For example, participants described creating "Good-Bye" books with a collection of photos and memory artifacts, organizing farewell parties, allocating time with special adults and friends in the school, accompanying students on visits to the receiving school, and sometimes following up with visits and phone calls once the child had moved. These were efforts to mark the time and place where the child was received as a guest, to signal the traces of their time, to remember and honour the relationships that were established, and hopefully—and at best—to allow the child to see their presence in the school and to know that they were seen.

Another important gesture reflective of hospitality was the importance of listening to children. Participants spoke of including students in their Welcome Meetings to elicit students' perspectives, hopes, and fears. They talked about listening to and responding to children's concerns, for example, when children had questions about why they could not see certain family members. One participant explained that when children came to her with questions or concerns about family members or visitations, she would offer to support them with a call to their social worker. Cindy explained:

> I would usually say, "Well, we can phone your social worker together. Let's see if she can come and talk a little bit more about this with you." Our kids definitely know we have really good relationships with their social workers and that we're someone that will listen and can, you know, in two minutes give the social worker a call together.

We heard a number of similar examples where school leaders would help the child phone their social worker to seek clarification, connect them to the provincial child's advocacy office, or arrange meetings to help them to understand and navigate the complexities of being in care. Participants explained how, when listening to children, they could better understand their sense of powerless and confusion about their situations and their futures.

Listening is an ethical response in which the listener remains distant from, yet attentive to, the Other (Todd, 2003). In Todd's (2003) reading of Levinas, listening requires a suspension of judgement and a sense of trust. It is a hopeful gesture for both the speaker and the listener in that it creates a space for new knowledge and for new relationality. This kind of listening requires the listener to learn from difference while acknowledging

that one can never fully know the Other. The purpose here is not to learn *about* the Other, but rather to learn *from* the Other. This type of listening is a quality of the ethical relation. Importantly, although the participants often provided numerous examples of how they listened to children in care and ways that they created spaces where children felt they could be listened to, some were also mindful of the ways in which they felt they needed to better include the child in conversations about their education and care and in decisions being made about them. As Cindy relayed, "That would probably be an area that we can be doing a better job with in terms of giving kids more voice in everything but it is certainly something we're thinking a lot about and trying to support."

As we have described, the everyday responses of the school leaders to children in their care attended to the particulars of each child and their situation and also focused on the relational. As Glenda (an early years learning support teacher) explained, "Every situation is unique and different and…so we can't force these relationships and say it must be so now, that may not be best practice for that family at that given time." These relations seem to be borne out of the school leader's response in the face of the Other, obligated to respond while doing so in a way that honours the particularities. Todd (2003) explains that how a teacher responds to a child's trauma carries pedagogical and ethical significance. The quality of this response requires being open to the Other while attending to the preservation of the Other's alterity. This dynamic requires both an openness to the Other while acknowledging "the Other who is radically distinct from the self" (p. 30). To respond ethically means to respond "to the face of the Other" (p. 30), and to allow the Other to maintain its distinctness.

"It Isn't Just about Friendliness": Creating a Culture of Hospitality

Although the focus on relationships and belonging were identified as central to their work with children in care, participants also explained that creating the conditions so that children in care actually *feel* as though they belong is sometimes difficult. Consider Adam's explanation: "We hope that fundamentally this is a place where they might feel like they belong…but it isn't just about friendliness, it's about us trying to find something they can connect to—that's where it's tricky." As we see in Adam's comments, he

insightfully explains how more than just individual relationships is required. Although we would not equate Levinas's notion of ethical relations as "friendliness," we think that Adam is referring to school-wide, structural, systematic, and curricular issues that are needed to better support children in care. Such structural changes in schools included gathering contact information and creating systems in order to invite students' relational networks (including social workers, biological families, and foster families) to school events. Some principals of younger children described scheduling regular play dates or meeting times during school time with biological siblings who were residing in different foster homes. Others scheduled therapy appointments at the school instead of sending the child to the therapist's office in the middle of the day. One determined high school teacher worked to develop a course specifically for youth in care about self-advocacy. The province approved the course for credit and the school district opened the course to youth in care from the other high schools in the division. The curriculum was designed to develop understandings of: children's rights, particularly within the realms of education, child welfare, and justice systems; the various agencies who offer supports for children in care (including advocacy, legal, housing, financial, and social-emotional); the resources available regarding trauma and self-care; and the funds and supports available for pursuing post-secondary education. This course and all of these efforts require leadership, staff support, social worker consultation, financial resources, and time.

Other similar school-based initiatives included kids in care advocacy groups. These are school-based initiatives organized similarly to school clubs, where children were invited to participate in activities such as playing games or making art. In one of the high schools, this group acts as an advocacy group in which the youth can invite peers who they identify as allies. The teachers who support this group plan activities to support the youth as they navigate their time, relationships, and courses in a very large school. There is a focus on developing relationships within the group and fostering a sense of looking out for each other. In this particular high school, they also started a back-to-school camp where the purpose was to invite kids in care to take part in student-organized activities prior to the start of school, when they had the building (which normally houses over 1,200 kids during the school year) virtually to themselves. This gave the students time to get to know each other, for them to develop relationships with some of their teachers, to do fun things together, to build community, and create a sense of belonging to the space prior to it being overrun with others. Some schools had hosted foster family

group meetings as a way to better connect with foster families, as well as to offer information sessions, for example, on Indigenous cultural practices and our shared colonial history. (This latter purpose is particularly important in this context since many of the foster families are recent immigrants to Canada, meanwhile most of the children in care are Indigenous—an eerie echo of Canada's colonialism that was not lost on these school leaders.) The foster family groups were all relatively new initiatives in the schools and were evolving in regards to their frequency, purposes, and structures.

What we see as important in these above examples are the ways in which these school leaders attempted to enact hospitality by "creating a space for/where students can be received" (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 31). In these examples, the school leaders are enacting Derrida's articulation of the host, where hospitality "does not seek to fit the guest into the space of the host but accepts that the arrival of the guest may change the space into which this guest is received" (Ruitenberg, 2015, p. 29). Thus, it is more than "just friendliness," but rather requires structural changes. Ruitenberg underscores the role of the host by explaining, "the question of whether the host feels comfortable in the presence of the guest is irrelevant" (p. 33). As one of the participants explained, "I'm hoping first and foremost they can walk in our hallways and have the confidence to walk into our classrooms and to be able to relate to other students and with the teachers within the classroom… They have every right to be part of this larger community." Developing this sense of hospitality is not premised on a requirement for the child to conform to predetermined expectations but rather, that the school alters their spaces and expectations to meet the child (Ruitenberg, 2011). A culture of hospitality means that the space is open to critique from the Other; the curriculum is questioned and malleable, structures are adaptable, and student choice is foundational.

These are also examples of where meeting the child in these spaces includes altering the curriculum so that the children in care—who, as a reminder, are predominantly Indigenous—can see themselves in both the content and the pedagogy of these spaces. Such efforts include incorporating Indigenous culture and perspectives into the routines of the school and the curriculum. This manifested in Pow Wow clubs, working with child services agencies to support funding for Elders to be a part of classrooms, and including smudging into daily practices. It also means working with teachers and staff to better understand Indigenous perspectives and to make conscious and concerted efforts to enliven curriculum accordingly. As such, "a hospitable curriculum, then, pays explicit attention to

the voices that have been excluded from its development, and the effects of their absence" (p. 34). Although the school leaders' attempts may risk "the add-and-stir" approach of which Marie Battiste (2013) cautions against (and of which the effectiveness or pervasiveness of these curricular and pedagogical efforts are beyond the scope of this project), they are recognized by these school leaders as necessary.

Conclusions

In using an ethic of hospitality as conceptual lens, we hoped to illustrate both the power of this philosophical orientation as well as the practical implications and possibilities of responding to children in care. It was clear that the participants felt a responsibility for these children and that their strongly-held convictions fueled their efforts to seek creative strategies in responding to the children in care in their schools. Here we illustrated their efforts as being premised on reconceptualized understandings of children, the centrality of ethical relations, and the willingness to create hospitable environments. However, although beyond the scope of this article, we would be remiss if we did not also note that these school leaders' stories also included failures and frustrations. Yet, the school leaders persisted. As Jason explained, "It's always about advocating for the child first. That is my priority: the child and the best interest of that child. So if there is anything that I feel is perhaps not in the best interest of that child, then I will do my best to advocate and speak up on their behalf." It seemed that many of the school leaders—through their sense of responsibility—felt that they could make change through their commitment and advocacy. Although this is admirable, it does not address the systemic issues of racism and colonization (both historic and present day); the structural failures and ineffectiveness of various systems to deal with very human and often immediate issues concerning vulnerable children; and the lack of awareness, funding and supports for the children in our care. What these school leaders demonstrated, even though they are embedded in systems that are ripe with barriers and obstacles, is that they were committed to an unconditional hospitality for children in care, attempting to create spaces and opportunities for students to see themselves in the school and to be seen by others. Such an orientation to responsibility and justice represents great hope, but must also be reflected throughout the education system itself.

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