

# A Student's Interpretation of Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation by Kiaras Gharabaghi

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## **A Student's Interpretation of *Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation* by Kiaras Gharabaghi**

Carly Spring Nangle

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It is made clear by reading *Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation* (Canadian Scholars, 2022) that the author, Kiaras Gharabaghi, is a knowledgeable child and youth care practitioner. Gharabaghi's ability to embed core field concepts into the practice of writing and teaching effectively conveys to the reader the central and irrevocable interdependence between research and practice in the child and youth care field. As he does so, readers are presented introductory information that serves as a base level understanding for dimensions of research, methods, theory, and practice implications through a critical social justice framework.

### **Place in contemporary child and youth care**

The child and youth care field does not get enough credit for the work it demands, and as a field, it is wildly undervalued (Harland & Morgan, 2010). There are many theories as to why this may be the case, but our ability to produce knowledge about the field is important in order to advocate for change and develop a praxis that progressively effects wide-reaching positive impact. That said, there are many tensions among practitioners in regards to how they value theory and/or practice. Some believe theory is not necessary to do child and youth care work, stressing the relational focus, while others believe it is essential in order to carry out a practice that impacts positive change for those in our scope of care (Mann-Feder et al., 2017). In *Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation*, students and professionals are given the tools and knowledge they need to understand why and how a combination of theory and practice is essential for maximizing a practitioner's potential. Because our field exists amid oppression, marginalization, and disparity, no matter how good the practitioner, we cannot simply exist here; we need social, systemic and policy change. These changes will not be made without research (Gharabaghi, 2022). By equipping the student, practitioner, or caretaker with research skills, not only can they develop their interests and advance their quality of praxis, Gharabaghi also opens the door for readers to generate knowledge that can be used to develop our field and serve its advocates.

### **Overview of the book**

#### *Part 1: "Research in Context"*

In Part 1, "Research in Context," Gharabaghi introduces the reader to some multidimensional concepts of knowledge and knowledge generation. He begins by setting the groundwork for critical thinking in the first few chapters, moving later into considerations for research development. The reader is introduced to the impact and role of research, its origins and influences, and our role as child and youth care practitioners in a field rooted in oppression.

Chapter 1 sets a foundation for the rest of the text by introducing key concepts, including epistemology, ontology,

social constructionism, and research methodology. In doing so, the author is simultaneously critical of how these concepts present in research and initiates discussion of individual, societal, and systemic biases, Eurocentricity, and colonialism. Additionally, we see implementation of social justice frameworks through direct discussion of marginalized populations and how research often perpetuates their oppression.

The social justice orientation to this text is at the forefront of the second chapter as the author acknowledges the influence of power, politics, and capitalism on research. By emphasizing how (often biased) research findings are ubiquitous in our day-to-day lives, and how they may perpetuate social injustice, Gharabaghi reminds the reader to think critically about information we are provided. Finally, he frames how this understanding can inform and shift our child and youth care praxis.

Moving into the third chapter, the reader is provided a deeper look at the relationship between child and youth care practice and research. Here, the reader encounters the idea that unless we think critically in our work and seek out knowledge, we risk carrying out the oppressive practices in which our field is rooted. Gharabaghi stresses the importance of research and knowledge for a practitioner's ability to maximize their potential in the field.

While the focus of the text so far has been on the theoretical dimensions of research as it pertains to child and youth care, from this point forward, the textbook maintains its social justice framework while shifting focus to the development of research. In Chapter 4 we are introduced to the process of formulating research questions. To do so, we are taught to consider relevance, language, ethics, reasoning, accuracy, context, resources, and logistics: lessons central for learners being introduced to the sometimes intimidating research process.

In Chapter 5, the reader is introduced to another preliminary step in research: the literature review. As an introductory-level text, this chapter does a thorough job of encouraging the reader to consider what we deem to be literature and how sources may vary in validity before moving toward more developed concepts such as how to critique this literature.

In the final chapter of Part 1, the author articulates important distinctions between research and advocacy. Here, much like the emphasis placed on research and practice, we learn the importance of grounding advocacy work in research in order to see any change we aspire to. Again, we are reminded that advocacy is central to our work as child and youth care practitioners, given that we are often situated in oppressive settings or roles.

### *Part 2: "Research Designs, Methods, and Tools"*

With Part 1 having introduced philosophical, political, and theoretical considerations of research, the chapters in Part 2 provide introductory-level knowledge on specific elements of research execution. Impressively, Gharabaghi manages, by using practical field examples, to maintain a social justice framework while discussing what are often understood as mundane concepts in research production.

In Chapter 7, Gharabaghi uses a relational lens to teach ethnography by likening it to observing common experiences, allowing the reader to feel connected to the often daunting idea of conducting research. Here, we learn the premise of ethnography and its different types. The reader is then presented with the many considerations that accompany this research methodology, including social influence, context, ethics, and consent, as well as the systematic logistics for analysis.

Next we are introduced to Afrocentric and Indigenous research methods. The author uses the space to communicate the oppressive, colonial roots of Eurocentric knowledge and develop the reader's understanding of other ways of knowing. This chapter encapsulates the need to decenter colonial knowledge and respect the knowledge production

methods and protocols of Black and Indigenous communities. Readers are encouraged to be critical of their own identity, how it shows up in research settings with diverse communities they do not represent, and changes or adaptations they might consider.

From here, readers are given a thorough introduction to participatory action research (PAR) and youth PAR. Drawing on themes of social justice from Part 1 of the textbook, we look at how research can be used to make necessary changes in the field. PAR is emphasized as being an empowering research model for the participants, allowing them the freedom to be the expert on their experience while the researcher adopts a facilitator role. Despite PAR's potential for change making and social justice action, Gharabaghi urges readers to use it with caution because logistics may prove challenging.

In Chapter 10, readers are taken through the considerations that come alongside recruitment and ethics. After being provided a clear understanding of convenience samples, purposive sampling, and other essential concepts, we are asked to consider intricacies such as bias, representation, and barriers to participation. The author urges researchers to exercise due diligence in these important considerations.

As we begin to explore interviews and focus groups in Chapter 11, we can see many theories of child and youth care work embedded in these methods. Beyond being introduced to the many adaptations of interviews and focus groups, the reader is reminded of the importance of holding safe and respectful spaces for all participants and adapting the methods as necessary to meet the needs of the individual. Readers are given real-life examples of how this work may look, and considerations that can be made for marginalized or other vulnerable participants. Other means of data collection are explored later, in Chapter 14, wherein the reader is taught about interviews and surveys. Here, we learn when it might be best to use one or the other in regards to process and results. Both methods have several levels of complexity, and the reader is introduced to these considerations.

Now that the reader has many of the tools to understand the production of research, we are introduced to collecting and interpreting quantitative data in Chapters 12 and 13. Here, we look at where we see quantitative data presented, how it can be implemented, and what limitations it possesses. Moving into the more technical elements, the reader is provided a baseline for understanding the methods involved, including how statistics are produced and represented. Finally, this work is brought back to the frame of child and youth care, allowing the reader to see its potential applicability. To conclude Part 2, Gharabaghi thoroughly and concisely walks the reader through qualitative analysis. While emphasizing the importance of a systematic process and reflection, we are given potential methods and strategies for execution.

### *Part 3: "Research in Perspective"*

By the final two chapters of the book, Gharabaghi has used explanation and practical examples to provide innumerable introductory lessons on research as it pertains to child and youth care. The final lesson to which we are introduced is that of limitations to research, done through the discussion of variabilities in definition, context, timelines, representation, etcetera. Finally, in the concluding chapter, the reader revisits core themes and ideas that were introduced throughout the book.

## **Theoretical framework and context**

While the conversational, relational approach in Gharabaghi's writing is worth acknowledging, it is the use of social justice and intersectional lenses that make this text one worth celebrating. By recognizing the role of child and youth care practitioners amid oppressive ecological systems, Gharabaghi conveys to the reader the pertinence

of equitable research for developing progressive standards of practice. Notably, there is a focus on antiracist approaches to research generation and broader child and youth care work.

Social justice and intersectional lenses are most evident in Part 1 of *Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation*. From the beginning, readers are introduced to the idea of accredited knowledge and research generation as Eurocentric practices, and are challenged to question the role of biases, power, and capitalism as potential motives or influences on research outcomes and our knowledge. As we move forward, Gharabaghi explains new research concepts, then discusses how they apply to child and youth care work by placing them in context and acknowledging intersections such as gender, race, dis/ability, and class. Not only does this allow the research concepts to feel tangible to the learner, it situates the importance of diligent, critical work in a field working with vulnerable people. Additionally, in doing so, Gharabaghi makes clear the importance of theoretical knowledge on our ability to thrive in the field.

### Author's thinking

Gharabaghi's writing is excellent and his experience as a practitioner is undeniable. Despite being a textbook on a subject matter that is often regarded as dull and mundane, *Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation* was a pleasure to read and engage with. The entire text was interesting, engaging, and practical while remaining informative to the degree necessary for an introductory-level research methods textbook. In the text, Gharabaghi stresses the importance of being critical of information. I would be remiss not to apply this understanding in this review.

First, I believe there is always room to decolonize our praxis further. It should be said that Gharabaghi does an excellent job of implementing a decolonial lens by unpacking the colonial roots in the development of knowledge and addressing examples of contemporary oppression faced by Indigenous peoples. As a result, readers are provided a lens through which to critique their participation in societal and systemic coloniality. While Gharabaghi notes the lack of credit given to Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, it would be interesting to address how such ways of knowing are present in the text. For example, is the conversational means of educating the reader a form of storytelling? Is this worth acknowledging?

Further, child and youth care learners are taught that in order to conduct equitable work that seeks to relationally support vulnerable, marginalized people, we must be aware of our own identity and how it shows up. Gharabaghi respectfully notes that he is not positioned to detail Indigenous or Afrocentric ways of knowing. That said, I do not necessarily see this as a reason to provide less information on these important topics. The text suggests that if we are conducting research with a population we do not represent, we might invite someone to help us in the process who does represent the sample population. With this idea in mind, could Gharabaghi, in place merely stating the limitations of his location, invite a guest author to write, or include the names of sources and/or authors to allow readers to learn more for themselves? If we are advocating to respect and uplift Indigenous ways of knowing, I believe the author should consider whether they are taking up additional space. This critique is not to diminish a very well established implementation of a decolonial lens but rather to build on its foundation, aware that decolonial work is never finished.

My final critique is in regards to Chapter 3, "Stuff We Do Without Knowing." Here, the reader is provided a very important lesson regarding how to act ethically and critically within the child and youth care field. Gharabaghi communicates the power we hold in our actions. However, the reader goes on to learn the faults of the group home setting. Given that we have, at this point, recently read about how our experiences shape our knowledge, I ask how this precept is evident in this chapter. Nothing untrue is stated; in fact, the experience Gharabaghi speaks to

is quite powerful. However, I believe this perception of group home work has been largely shaped by the author's personal experience. My critique of this chapter is whether it is fair to liken all group homes to this one? It could be worth specifying the type of group home. For instance, I am sure the approach to care in a publicly funded home would be different than in one that is funded privately; I am sure the care, regulation, concern, and surveillance would be different in a home for folks using drugs than in a "clean" home; I am sure homes tending to neurological disabilities would take different approaches to safety and surveillance, etcetera.

### Key learning

Gharabaghi does an excellent job of introducing research concepts to the reader by homing in on one specific concept or theory each chapter and providing clear, concise lessons. More importantly, these lessons are placed in the child and youth care context, communicating practical implications. This allows the reader to understand the power that research, or a lack thereof, may have when working in the field. Gharabaghi aptly invites the reader to be critical of the knowledge we possess and provide as practitioners in regards to the many layers of biases that influence our epistemologies. Therefore, I would argue a key takeaway for the reader is the politics of research. Readers should also complete the text understanding the Eurocentric roots of and colonial influences on knowledge, research, and accreditation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *Research and the Field of Child and Youth Care: An Invitation* by Kiaras Gharabaghi is an excellent introduction to research concepts for child and youth care practitioners and learners. The author uses conversational and relational approaches in his writing, which allows for an enjoyable reading experience wherein the lessons are tangible and applicable to experience. We see a commendable use of decolonial and social justice frameworks which, in their execution, encourage the reader to be critical of their own experiences, influence, power, and identity. That said, there is always room to further decolonize our practice. I would highly recommend this text for any child and youth care learner, as its lessons about research are taught alongside valuable lessons in ethics, social justice, and critical thinking.

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