



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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**“Exploring the Experiences of Child and Youth Care Workers in  
Residential Care Through a Constructive-Developmental Lens”**

School of Child and Youth Care

Tuesday, February 13, 2018  
9:00 A.M.  
Clearihue Building  
Room B007

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Douglas Magnuson, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. James Anglin, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Thom Garfat, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Laura Steckley, School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde-Glasgow  
(Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Annemiek Harder, Department of Pedagogy and Educational Science, University of Groningen

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Darcy Mathews, School of Environmental Studies, UVic

## **Abstract**

Child and youth care workers in residential care provide support and intervention to young people who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Caring for these young people can be complex and demanding and many child and youth care practitioners struggle to meet the challenges associated with their roles. Practice problems include volatile and punitive environments, inability of practitioners to safely manage young people's threatening and aggressive behaviours, and staff turnover and burnout. These problems are often attributed to job stress, personal characteristics of practitioners, and lack of education, training and professional development.

To reconceptualise the aforementioned practice problems Robert Kegan's (1982) constructive developmental theory was used as a theoretical framework to explore the experiences of child and youth care workers in residential care through a new lens. The research was guided by two main questions: 1) How do different meaning-making systems influence how practitioners cope with and experience the demands of the job, and 2) What role does the organizational environment play, if any, in mediating or exacerbating the demands of the job for practitioners with different meaning-making systems?

An exploratory study was conducted using a mixed methods design. The study was conducted in two stages. First, ninety-nine participants completed the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL), Work Environment Scale (WES), and Leadership Development Profile (LDP). Linear regression was conducted to explore the relationships between the ProQOL, LDP, and WES and most results were not significant.

From the initial pool, eighteen participants were selected for in-depth, qualitative interviews to assess their constructive-developmental orders – the ways in which they make meaning – and explore their experiences in residential care in the areas of job satisfaction and success, challenge, and coping with the demands of the job. The ways in which participants at different constructive-developmental orders experience and cope with the challenges of their jobs are described and themes are identified. There was internal coherence among participants of the same epistemological order and across organizations.

The dissertation examines implications of the findings for child and youth care practice, education, training, supervision, research and organizational management in residential care.