On October 20–22, 2016, the Association for Research in Cultures of Young People (ARCYP) hosted the inaugural international conference, Youngsters: On the Cultures of Children and Youth (Youngsters 2016) at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. The first conference of its kind in North America, Youngsters 2016 was created to explore the intersections between childhood and youth studies as interdisciplinary fields of scholarship and community engagement. Drawing together internationally renowned researchers from across the social sciences and humanities, with child- and youth-engaged artists, community groups, and students, Youngsters 2016 offered new sightlines from which to see connections and establish future directions for our
work. The conference’s three keynote speakers—Steven Bruhm, the Robert and Ruth Lumsden Professor of English at Western University; Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Professor and Chair of Modern Media and Culture at Brown University; and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Indigenous author, artist, scholar, activist, and member of the Alderville First Nation—set the tone for the interdisciplinary nature of the conference. Building on these distinguished keynotes, the conference also planned a special round table on “Youngsters and the Arts,” featuring Vancouver-based artists, and one on writing and publishing in children’s and youth studies, with Jeunesse lead editor Dr. Heather Snell and founding editor Dr. Mavis Reimer as panellists. The research paper sessions, including “Queer Youth Cultures,” “Writing Indigeneity,” “Rights and Resistance,” and “Mental Wellness,” were designed not only to address significant contemporary research topics in the field but also to encourage dialogue across disciplines, methodological approaches, and international contexts, and to challenge the boundaries among practitioners, artists, and scholars. The Special Section of Jeunesse that follows is a celebration of this event with a sample from the range of presented work.

As past and current Presidents of the ARCYP, as well as conference coordinators, we believe that there are multiple pressing issues that support the need for an event like Youngsters 2016. To begin with, a prevailing sense of crisis and fundamental change in the lives of young people is present across a range of communities and identities today. We can mark these prevailing intensities through a host of concerns and tensions that indicate a general broadening of risk taking and risk bearing as properties of young lives (Appadurai). Risk and precarity have, of course, long been associated with what it means to be young. In the West, as the notion of youth culture emerged in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, for instance, to be young seemed tied to notions of transition and flux, to experiences of change that were thought to shape the development of youthful imaginations, identities, and sexualities. The very boundaries between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, are increasingly uncertain and treated with suspicion by many. Moreover, historical and contemporary popular cultures, legal discourses, and educational policies around youth and childhood tend to be rooted in ideologies of race, gender, sexuality, physical mobility, and socio-economic class that privilege generalized assumptions about the experiences of young people across diverse identities, cultural backgrounds, and geographies. The project of unpacking and challenging assumptions, absences, and histories is an integral part of current work across disciplines in the field of childhood and youth studies. Meanwhile, what it means to be a child—to play, to learn, and to imagine—is being recast by the new and profound conditions of mediation, surveillance, participation, and commodification that characterize the contemporary moment.

Amid these pressing issues, to date there has been no umbrella academic organization or regular
conference to bring together scholars working in childhood and youth studies, particularly those focused on the cultures of young people. If surprising, this is in part a function of how recent the development of the field of childhood studies is. The year 1991 is often thought to mark the consolidation and beginning of childhood studies as a distinct field of inquiry. In that year, Brooklyn College at City University of New York established its Childhood Studies program. This development reflects changes marked by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the introduction of the social studies of childhood in James and Prout's *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, and the subsequent blossoming of the field across North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Childhood studies would now take their place alongside the much longer history of youth studies.

The history of the latter field extends back at least as far as the work of Stanley Hall in *Adolescence*, and includes major contributions from George Herbert Mead, Robert Park, and the Chicago School of sociology; Talcott Parson’s research on youth cultures in the 1940s; and the youth cultural studies tradition that arose in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s to become a global phenomenon. If distinct, the fields of childhood and youth studies intersect and share conceptual and methodological ground. Both fields remain committed to drawing on disciplines as diverse as sociology, anthropology, literary studies, and education research to address contemporary and historical experiences of crisis and change in young people’s lives. Moreover, childhood and youth studies share a deep commitment to understanding young people as active social and cultural agents, not as incomplete beings, awaiting their full appearance on the stage of life, but as whole

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human beings in their own right, with specific needs, concerns, experiences, and possibilities.

It is on the basis of these shared concerns that ARCYP emerged in 2007 at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Canada, as an interdisciplinary scholarly association to address the needs of researchers and others working with young people’s texts and cultures nationally and internationally. The process through which disciplinary fields and research associations come together is always “contingent, uneven and provisional” (Buckingham 10). Disciplines—and their related research associations and journals—are shaped by the internal dynamics of the field and researchers’ own concerns, as well as external pressures from funders and the larger political, technological, and cultural character of the times. ARCYP’s history has been shaped by ongoing intellectual tensions within the fields of childhood and youth studies (Poyntz, Coulter, and Brisson), and yet the emergence of ARCYP was also a function of missing infrastructure among researchers whose work focuses on the lives of young people. As a consequence of this missing infrastructure, childhood and youth studies scholars have often occupied minority positions within other disciplines. ARCYP emerged in response to this context, to become an academic home for researchers who sometimes work in isolation, marginalized to the “children’s table” for research (Duane). This association emerged to support collaboration and engagement among scholars whose work addresses policies, networks, and practices at the centre of children and youth cultures.

As the journal *Jeunesse* is linked to this interdisciplinary association, it seems incredibly fitting to include this Special Section focused on its inaugural conference. This Special Section of *Jeunesse* features two papers and one keynote that provide a sample of the work presented at the conference. Extended from his keynote address, Steven Bruhm’s “Things to Do with Your Imaginary Child” playfully uses theories of imaginary friends from clinical psychology to consider adults who consciously deploy imaginary children for a variety of reasons across a range of narratives not intended for young readers. This keynote illustrates a reflective engagement with conflicted child-adult relationships articulated within childhood texts that primarily exists in theories of temporalities in relation to queer childhood (Stockton; Freeman). Bruhm draws upon these theories to frame the contentious representation of non-reproductive adults who are not explicitly parents to young people.

In her article “Singing and Dancing ‘Their Bit’ for the Nation: Canadian Children’s Performances for Charity circa the First World War,” Heather Fitzsimmons Frey uses archival research to explore the role of Canadian young people in supporting the war effort. She examines how public performances and entertainment reinscribed an idealized national identity
for the young people as participants. She discusses these engagements with patriotism in relation to the dance recitals and vaudevillian performances of three groups of child performers across Canada during this time period. Moving from historical research about children’s articulation of national discourses through performance to contemporary engagement with discourse through musical performance, this issue of the journal also includes Diane Pecknold’s “The Politics of Voice in Tween Girls’ Music Criticism,” which examines how tween girls negotiate political and social meanings through their collaborative and embodied engagement with popular music. Pecknold argues that, “[b]eyond being a missed opportunity to understand girls’ development into future political subjects, our failure to listen to their music criticism constitutes an act of political exclusion in the present” (70). This focused analysis of group discussions at girls’ rock camps across the United States offers a distinctive analytic approach that challenges normative perceptions of girls’ fandom.

These three pieces framed by performance studies, popular music studies, girlhood studies, queer theory, and archival research approaches reflect a sample from the impressive range of disciplinary and analytic approaches presented at the Youngsters 2016 conference. Youngsters 2016 came about as an outgrowth of ARCYP’s opening decade of development, to showcase and discuss the astonishing breadth of interdisciplinary scholarship in childhood and youth studies. Youngsters 2016 fostered the conditions for a field-wide conversation. Papers, plenary panels, and keynote lectures explored the rich diversity of aesthetic, technological, and cultural forms of life shaping the experiences and subjectivities of young people, including the ways in which young people’s cultures and texts are constituted by economic, political, and policy forces. Youngsters 2016 was made possible by support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and universities across Western Canada. While an inaugural event, the next Youngsters conference is proposed for Spring 2019 at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, with the continued aim of bolstering the emerging network of national and international research in childhood and youth studies.
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Works Cited


