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Early Childhood Education: A Site of Entanglements, Responsivity & Relationality

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It is too simple the way we sometimes live our lives for after all life simply is a serious matter.

~ Margot Bickel

As ECPN pedagogists in British Columbia we are committed to creating conditions that foster pedagogical relations. We recognize such relations—amongst all beings—as interdependent, interconnected and entangled. In other words, we do not see ourselves, humans, as outside the worlds we inhabit. Rather, we are *of* them, yet we also recognize that these are unequal worlds where children, families, educators and communities are differently situated (Haraway, 2016).

We commit to the ECPN declaration to “enact everyday speculative practices toward liveable futures” within early childhood educational spaces and beyond. This includes opening possibilities for just worlds by collaboratively engaging with and intervening in these unequal worlds (Vintimilla, Land, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & ECPN Curriculum Working Group, 2020). With this in mind we take seriously the question “How do we live well with others?” (Vintimilla et al., 2020) and suggest that a key facet of such practices is responsivity.

For us, responsivity is like stretching our arms out as an invitation to go deeper and beyond conversation. It is a call to act. We share three anecdotes about responsivity that provide a glimpse into a pedagogist’s thinking. We conclude by gesturing toward how a pedagogist’s work is always situational, connected to the personal-political and performed in pedagogical terms (Vintimilla et al., 2020).

Courtney

When I first considered the question “Who is the ECPN pedagogist in BC?” and thought about the importance of being in relation with others, a vivid memory from childhood kept surfacing for me: My mother is driving me downtown to buy new ballet slippers. I’m asking her why there are so many people sleeping along the street. She explains homelessness as best she can to her 8-year-old child. I remember asking her if we could bring some of the people home with us and crying while my mom tried to express why helping just wasn’t as easy as that.

Why does this memory follow me? What does this memory do to my pedagogist becoming? It feels very much present in my pedagogical commitments today. At a time when the world seems more divided than ever, I believe attending to ethical relationality and responsivity in our communities is vital. As a pedagogist, I ask, what are our obligations and responsibilities to every figure and form that make up a community? From our neighbours in houses to our neighbours living on the streets, from the raccoons pillaging our trash at night to the bacteria growing on surfaces and in bodies, from the local library’s building design to the stolen land we walk on. These are interconnected. They shape one another. As a

pedagogue I am compelled to question how we engage with and intervene in our unequal worlds. How might we (re)compose these worlds together?

Haideh

Courtney's story of encountering homelessness reminds me of the many times I have heard a parent or educator say, in the name of protecting children, "They [the children] are not ready to know this. They are not ready to understand. They will be hurt."

I remember when my child, aghast with the level of poverty and inequity in our communities on the North Shore, brought "how and why" questions to her teacher. The teacher called me and expressed her well-intentioned concern for my daughter's "emotional and social regulation." I did not share the teacher's concerns, but rather admired my daughter for beginning to question why and how some lives are valued while others are not. At the time I wondered, are we not bubble-wrapping our children by closing our eyes, our mouths and our thoughts to the inequities of our worlds?

Today, as a pedagogue, I wonder how we might respond differently to such questions. What if we looked at children's questions, not as a problem to solve individually, but rather as a provocation for collective thinking, dialogue and curriculum making? If we explore the intentions behind the decisions we make, as educators, as parents, as communities, what might we learn about our responses and actions? There are many hidden forms of injustice and inequality that call for attention. How might early childhood education act as a site for making these inequities visible in order to intervene and invent otherwise?

Jiyeon

Courtney's and Haideh's stories have me thinking about early childhood education as a site of resistance and invention, wherein pedagogical responsiveness is always in relation to the times in which we live. For example, many changes and adjustments have been made regarding health policies in and for a pandemic. Early childhood education, like all professions, has been called upon to respond in ways that facilitate both individual and collective health.

While understanding the importance of heightened health policies and procedures at this time, as a pedagogue I also question how these policies will shape educational relations in the months ahead. Listening to educators, I hear their concerns about how they are going to live these new policies. I also hear their desire to think about the guidelines pedagogically, as entangled in their co-composing of curriculum with children, families and communities. What does it mean to generate curriculum while carefully thinking with and reimagining the health and policy guidelines? What does it do to recognize that viruses and bacteria permeate and shape our world?

I am also reminded of the important commentaries emerging that highlight the numerous ways COVID-19 is experienced through differentially situated, unequal worlds. Which bodies bear the weight of this pandemic, its deaths and labour? And how will we intervene and enliven these impacts pedagogically?

These stories help us to realize that the everyday mundane might be unseen, possibly taken for granted as "just the way things are." However, if we take our commitment to responsiveness seriously, we must notice and attend to such encounters, and work to make visible how monumental these micro-moments can be. Our stories call on us to question what is possible when we *don't* turn away from our entangled relations—the not-so-smooth, the at times contentious, the generative, and the joyful—in our pursuit of

living well together with/in our common worlds (Common Worlds Research Collective: <http://commonworlds.net/>). We carry this questioning into our work as pedagogists: when we visit the early years centres we work with, when we gather educators together for collective dialogues about pedagogical concerns and matterings, when we share curricular curiosities, conversations, critical reflections, and experimentations through our writings, when we collectively enact everyday speculative practices. It is our hope that otherwise relations—those we do not already know, may not expect or even imagine—might be generated through such engagements.

We invite educators to think alongside us, considering your own situated context, and wonder: What happens when we notice the potential within our daily mundane moments and stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016)? We lean on the ECPN declarations again to ask: What becomes possible when, through these noticings, we recognize the world's relations as entangled and respond accordingly? How might such responsivity help create conditions for living well together with/in just worlds (Vintimilla et al., 2020)?

References

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*.

Vintimilla, C. D., Land, N., Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., & ECPN Curriculum Working Group. (2020). ECPN pedagogical declarations: A working document.