

ISSUE 7: August 2022



# The Here and Now Reimagining Early Childhoods In Urgent Times



Photo credit: Sylvia Kind, Atelierista

## Beyond Spaces

We begin this edition of the *ECPN Here & Now* by wishing our early childhood colleagues an enjoyable and restorative summer! However, we do so recognizing the seriousness currently faced by many, trying to stay safe during heat warnings and/or being confronted by painful trauma

reignited by [Pope Francis' apology to survivors and families](#) for [harmful legacies](#) wrought by the Catholic-run Residential School system.

Getting deeper into the summer season means recognizing we are half way through an unprecedented year of federal and provincial governments making [bold and necessary moves](#) to support the [creation of a nationally-funded early learning and child care \(ELCC\) system](#). At this critical juncture, we are particularly pleased the BC Ministry for Education and Child Care has renewed funding for the [ECPN](#). As pedagogists working in 1,456 unique BC early years programs, we look forward to continue working closely with early childhood communities and child care [advocates](#) from across the country to make the national ELCC system a reality.

In the making of such a system, we [envision early learning and child care as a pedagogical project](#) responsive to the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century living. A system that refuses universalized applications of a service-delivery model, while respecting the unique contexts within which child care centres are situated. In addition to creating a system that honours local realities, these pedagogical spaces must also support educators in being responsive to connections with broader community and global issues, such as the current climate crisis.

With this in mind, early learning and child care must function as a collaborative process involving a myriad of protagonists in the creation of a new way forward. Reducing it to technocratic processes like 'school readiness' does not, nor ever did, reflect the diversity of perspectives on what a child can be or their role in society. Following the calls of [Indigenous scholars](#) and other leaders representing marginalized communities in society, we are resolute in thinking and doing beyond approaches in ELCC practice that continue to order children, families and ways of being in accordance with dominant Euro-Western ideals and desires.

*What happens if we consciously and collectively approach early childhood as an invitation into a process of creating conditions for something otherwise to emerge?*

Reframing early learning and child care as a pedagogical project opens up space for creating a system that supports the ethical, everyday practice of listening, questioning, reflecting and experimenting to create alternative narratives about early childhood. It requires us to resist falling into the trap of using empty descriptors like 'quality' or 'school readiness' to describe the complex work done on a day-to-day basis in early childhood centres. This includes government, at all levels, in their efforts to enact effective policy to support the rollout of a nation-wide system of early learning and child care. While emboldened by concrete actions taken by governments thus far in the process, the rhetoric being used to frame this monumental project is, at times, deeply concerning. As ECEs, managers, and advocates rightly point out, an [over-emphasis on 'building spaces'](#) masks struggles in the field to maintain professional standards in the face of labour shortages, resist policies aimed at undercutting levels of education required to enter the field, and support the need for ongoing ECE professional development, all of which are foundational for

fulfilling commitments laid out in the [BC Early Learning Framework](#). However unintended, relying on the language of ‘building spaces’ or ‘bolstering the economy’ to justify spending and signal action on creating a national ELCC program reduces early childhood educators to little more than part of a mechanistic backdrop to apply to ‘empty spaces’ that are ready to be filled. In actuality, ethical ELCC practice requires much more.

Of course, funding the creation of early childhood centres is an essential component in the creation of a nationally-funded system. At the same time, limiting popularized understandings of the process to one of ‘building spaces’ risks masking important questions about the kinds of spaces being built (public, private?). It also risks obscuring the importance of laying the groundwork for understanding early childhood educators as highly trained and properly remunerated professionals in order to meet the challenge and privilege of working with young children. Going forward, we call on governments to emphasize more than ‘creating spaces’ – it is time for new conversations based on what it means to build capacity for the [conditions necessary to create the vibrant spaces that all children deserve](#).

We are honoured to take part in [critical conversations](#) taking shape during this time of immense change, as we continue to stand with early childhood educators, professional associations, and advocates working with government in pursuing a publicly funded system that respects children and their communities. We believe in the vitality of growing an ELCC system that is [situated and contextual](#), alongside recognizing [Indigenous governance and jurisdiction](#). That is, we look forward to creating a system predicated on the recognition that ALL children as citizens have the right to relevant lively and just pedagogical spaces, without doing so in a way that undermines Indigenous children’s right to self-determination as stated in UNDRIP. Going forward, it is our hope that all involved in the creation of a national ELCC system recognize the transformative opportunity before us if we consider what is possible when we see beyond early childhood spaces as vital step towards making positive change.

---

## Continuing the Conversation

Creating the conditions for children to actively participate in transforming the world they are inheriting

Multiple news alerts have been issued this week over heat warnings blanketing much of BC and Atlantic Canada, following a [statement warning of potential health risks](#) by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Thursday, July 21<sup>st</sup>. While not expected to reach extremes experienced during the [North American 2021 heat dome](#), this week’s weather warnings add to growing concerns over the intensified cascade of climate-crisis events. As [Nxumalo, Nayak & Tuck \(2022\)](#) remind us “No matter when you read this or where you are reading from, you will also be reading during and ‘just after’ the devastation cause by climate crisis. We can count on the permanence

of crises popping up, eroding away, and worsening. We are in times of guaranteed precarity” (p. 97).

This is not to say the conversation is over. In fact, within mainstream ECE circles, the conversation has hardly begun. By being rendered increasingly vulnerable to devastating inheritances due to inaction on making necessary change, as [Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw \(2022\)](#) point out, young children have been overwhelmingly left out of conversations due to tendencies in mainstream Western society to attempt to shield children from so-called adult concerns. Doing so negates our responsibility to support children in the necessary process of [learning to become \*with the world\*](#). It also impedes their ability to be taken seriously as co-participants in crafting alternative modes of thinking and doing in a rapidly changing world.

With social media becoming rife with climate anxieties, we urge colleagues to think carefully about the narratives we promote through social media platforms and our work with children and families. [Breaking with the status quo approaches to education](#) that have contributed to the making of these challenging times is vital if we are to take seriously our responsibility of creating [alternative modes of engagement](#) for liveable worlds. This includes [holding governments accountable](#) for enacting policies that allow for necessary systemic change to occur. We also invite colleagues to reconsider our role in promoting discourses masking [systemic injustices](#) that have led to uneven inheritances for children, within Canada and around the world. How can we meaningfully engage in the necessary project of creating the conditions for society’s youngest members, who are poised to be most impacted by ecological challenges in the long term, to actively participate in transforming the world they are inheriting?

Read and follow us on Twitter to continue the conversation. We invite you to join [@vpacinek](#) [@BlaiseMindy](#) [@common\\_worlds](#) and others engaging with the issue.

Join the Conversation