

Pedagogists and the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network

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The BC Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN), funded through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, is implementing the new role of the pedagogist as mentioned in the BC Early Learning Framework. We conceptualize the ECPN as a public forum for the advancement of innovative early childhood pedagogies and the establishment of a provincial network of pedagogists to support early childhood educators in BC.

Reimagining Professional Learning

The ECPN expands the pilot work of two MCFD-funded projects. Between 2005 and 2011, the Investigating Quality (IQ) Project, developed by Drs. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Alan Pence at the University of Victoria, worked to broaden and deepen discussions on quality in the field of early childhood education (ECE). One of the goals of the IQ Project was to promote the active engagement of early childhood educators in reconceptualist pedagogies that lead to the formation of critical and innovative ECE environments (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Rinaldi, 2006). The IQ Project accomplished this objective through a series of learning circles with groups of early childhood educators from across BC who engaged in study and discussions around alternative conceptions of quality (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot & Sanchez, 2015).

In Phase I, educators from Greater Vancouver and south and central Vancouver Island participated in the project. An internal evaluation of this phase found that participants were greatly excited about the opportunity to network with others and engage with emerging ideas in their field. With such positive responses from participating educators, IQ Project Phase II continued and enhanced the activities that took place in Phase I (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2009). An external evaluation of the IQ Project's learning circles model was conducted May through November 2010, which led to recommendations that learning circle facilitators should work with clusters of neighbourhood programs and that their role include being an "expert observer" regularly within these programs (Mort & Read, 2011, p. 25). These recommendations were taken up in 2011, when MCFD provided funding to extend the IQ Project with the Pedagogical Facilitators Pilot Project. This extended project launched in 2011 in Victoria and Burnaby/Coquitlam, and in April 2014 a third project site was added in Terrace/Kitimat. What resulted from these projects, herein referred to simply as the IQ Project, was an alternative model to professional development that included a pedagogical facilitator who supported early childhood educators in their practice through (a) regular visits to the participating early childhood

educators' early years setting/centre, (b) facilitating learning circles for all of the educators participating in the project, (c) regular communication and sharing of resources among the early childhood educators, and (d) producing and engaging in pedagogical narrations.

Continuing the IQ Project, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, with Kathleen Kummen and B. Denise Hodgins, created the ECPN grounded in this vision. Integrating the learning from 10 years of the IQ Project, the ECPN recognizes the tremendous value that educators placed on sharing, experimenting, and learning within a collective and the shifts that took place in educators' knowledge and pedagogical practices within such a professional learning model (Hodgins & Kummen, 2018; Kummen & Hodgins, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Hodgins, submitted for review). We learned that educators engage in innovative pedagogical work when they work alongside a pedagogist (reflecting other findings and recommendations, see Peleman et al., 2018; Urban et al., 2011; Vandebroek et al., 2016). ECPN is fully implementing the role of the pedagogist across the province beginning in January 2020. Approximately 30 pedagogists are going to provide critical pedagogical support to early childhood educators.

ECPN's work is also consistent with the findings of a systematic review

of working conditions, training, and quality of ECE programs in Europe. Vandebroek, Peeters, Urban, and Lazzari (2016) cite four key factors for successful professional development:

- A coherent pedagogical framework or learning curriculum that builds upon research and addresses local needs.
- The active involvement of practitioners in the process of importing education practice enacted within their settings.
- A focus on the practice-based learning taking place in constant dialogue with colleagues, parents, and local communities.
- The provision of enabling working conditions, such as the availability of paid hours for non-contact time and the presence of a mentor or coach who facilitate practitioners' reflection in reference groups.

The Pedagogist Role

The ECPN will begin with three interconnected streams. The CCRR stream will position pedagogists within a CCRR program to work with educators in a hub of licensed ECE programs in that program's community. In the post-secondary institution stream, faculty pedagogists will provide pedagogical support to educators who serve as mentors to student early childhood educators. The Indigenous stream, led by ECPN partner BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, will pilot pedagogists (or a First Nations equivalent term) working within First Nations early years programs both on and off reserve, as well as urban Indigenous early years programs. These three streams are not separate systems but rather encompass different models within one network.

Pedagogists are leaders in pedagogy. They ensure educators' active involvement in contextualizing and making (living) curriculum within a program. They are an imperative provocateur to enacting a pedagogical project that builds upon research and addresses local circumstances. The ELF defines a pedagogist as:

A professional responsible for helping to create and sustain quality early childhood education (ECE) programs by supporting educators to continue to implement the B.C. Early Learning Framework; to design, execute, and evaluate inquiries/projects within their practice settings; and to engage in critically reflective dialogue about pedagogical practice through pedagogical narrations. They immerse themselves in the centres, support the educators' efforts to engage with children and families in innovative, critically reflective practice, and extend the practice of the educators and the children by introducing new ideas and materials. (Government of British Columbia, 2019, p. 7)

In order to create pedagogical processes, pedagogists ask: What are the current conditions in which we live that we want to interrupt? What are the current conditions that we want to foster? How do these conditions and their historical legacies implicate educators/children/early education? How do we collaboratively create pedagogical conditions that generate more livable lives for all in early childhood? Following the commitments created by the Early Childhood Pedagogical Network, the role of the pedagogist is to:

- Challenge the structures and habits of early childhood education.

- Engage with new pedagogies and praxis in early childhood education.
- Ask novel questions that enhance our early childhood lexicon.
- Interrupt the status quo that creates marginalization and injustices in early childhood education.
- Co-generate pedagogies that create more livable futures, in particular challenging educational structures that are rooted in colonialism and developmentalism.

For many in BC, working with a pedagogist will be a shift in thinking about and receiving professional learning. We hope that participating educators will cherish being in a position to continuously explore what it means to teach/live/practice in an unstable, unpredictable, always emerging world.

For more information about the ECPN and the pedagogist role, email ecpn@uwo.ca and follow us on Twitter @EcpnBc.

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platform. We look forward to being able to share the results of this project in the future.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank all of the early childhood educators who have taken part in this research. This includes the 114 educators from across BC who took part in Laura's doctoral research on the experiences and needs of early childhood educators. We are thankful for the educators in the Kamloops area who took part in the two peer-mentoring projects in this area, including the pilot project. We are grateful for the 204 ECEs and 20 facilitators who have joined us in the current project. We would also like to acknowledge the Government of Canada through the Canada – British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, through which this project is funded.

From the words of Pam Preston, executive director of Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre, the goal of this project is to both “build capacity and leave a legacy.”

We would like to end with a quote from an early childhood educator, a participant from a recent peer-mentoring group:

“...one of the reasons why ECEs burn out so quickly, they are overworked and they are not valued. And I think that peer mentorship ... having those constant valuing comments and support, it would sustain us a lot in this field.”

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