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The Here and Now Reimagining Early Childhoods In Urgent Times



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Reimagining the role of ‘educating early childhood educators’ in BC

In last month’s edition of [the Here & Now](#) we highlighted issues raised by ECEBC’s call to radically reimagine [The Role of the Early Childhood Educator \(ECE\) in British Columbia](#). However, to talk about reimagining the role without addressing a crucial vehicle that enables change in the process of *becoming* early childhood educators would be remiss. This month we extend this important conversation by asking: *what kind of education might need to be in place to realize this new vision?* Rethinking BC post-secondary institutions’ responsibilities to shift approaches to ‘educating educators’ is imperative if we are committed to fully embrace this moment of unprecedented political will. At a time when we are actively working with all levels of government to create a system that nourishes the vision of creating more livable and just worlds outlined in the [BC Early](#)

[Learning Framework \(ELF\)](#), the dispositions and knowledges to be nurtured in future educators must be at the forefront of our collective efforts.

Inspired by recent conversations with ECPN [Post-Secondary Institution \(PSI\) pedagogists](#), we examine questions pertinent to the education of current and future educators. What dispositions and knowledges need to be nurtured in future educators to actualize systemic change? What changes are required to practicum placements and assignments to align with the values and commitments for practice outlined by ECEBC? How do we support educators already in the field to engage in the process of realizing transformative change?

Propositions to support necessary change

Taking seriously our collective responsibility to these and other questions, we firstly propose that the education of future early childhood educators begins with a discussion about the role of educators as critically and ethically responding to complexities and diversities of the real lives of children and families.

Within this context, faculty are called to greet new ECE students by quickly challenging the myth that a ‘love of children is enough’ in terms of what makes a ‘good’ educator. Instead, how might we invite students into a rich process of cultivating dispositions for engaging respectful and ethical relationships with children and families? Not only does such a shift in approach align with ECEBC’s new vision and the vision laid out by the province of BC in its Early Learning Framework, it also signals the profession’s commitment to upholding the field of early childhood as an ethical project, requiring educators to make complex decisions with children and families in everyday practice.

Secondly, we propose that students deserve experiences and guidance that nurture the attributes that will support them in working collectively with others in joyful and sometimes difficult and unpredictable situations.

Living joyfully with children requires more than good intentions and love; it requires pedagogical commitments that support educators in the work necessary to create livable spaces for young children. It also requires serious consideration of the values undergirding understandings of who is deserving of unconditional love, respect, and self-determination in the first place, as well as deep examination of what loving relationships need *to do* in practice to fully honour all children and families we work with in every region of BC.

In thinking deeply with faculty pedagogists around ECEBC’s position paper and in response to the [Conditions for Moving Beyond “Quality” in Canadian Early Childhood Education: An occasional paper](#) by the Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory, we strongly recommend that early childhood students engage in course work beyond pedagogy and curriculum. Like our elementary school colleagues, early childhood educators require engagement in electives that have the breadth and depth of course work that allows them to bring diverse knowledges and understandings to practice with children as they work together in processes of making meaning

of their worlds. If we truly respect children, as our youngest citizens, they deserve to learn alongside educators capable of offering them multiple ways of thinking and being in the world.

As future educators in this province, teaching on the traditional and ancestral territories of [204 distinct bands](#), we thirdly propose all early childhood educator programs include courses on the [colonial history](#) of these lands, as well as appropriate teachings to understand the knowledges, protocols and histories of the Nations on whose land they are teaching.

All faculty in early childhood programs should include those persons considered knowledge keepers by the Nations on the lands of the post-secondary institutions who are hired to teach courses that introduce students to how to respectfully engage in education that is disruptive of ongoing colonial practices and honours Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Lastly, we propose that future educators have practicum experiences that allow them to engage deeply with the same group of children, families and educators over multiple practica.

Practicum should be an opportunity for students to learn the culture of a space, to participate in the rhythms and flows of a program and over seasons as children grow and change. This would allow students to develop and maintain relationships, to experience the challenges and joys that are part of the everyday lives of the children and others in the centre, to think deeply with children about their curiosities and questions, and to spend time learning to live well with others. Whenever possible, faculty pedagogists should be present in the centres supporting the mentor educators and students. The so-called theory/practice divide can only be bridged when we see the post-secondary classroom and the early childhood classroom as in relationship.

Importantly, ECEBC's visionary position paper offers us all a starting point to reimagine the education of early childhood educators – to ask questions that invite us to consider what dispositions and knowledges are necessary for future educators to be able to walk with children and families in the 21st century, and to reconsider conditions necessary to learn what it means to teach, live, and practice in an unstable, unpredictable, always emerging world.

Continuing the Conversation

Responding to the Federal Government's Introduction of New Gun Legislation

On May 30, 2022, the Liberal federal government [introduced gun legislation](#) to freeze the import, buying, and selling of handguns in Canada. If passed, this legislation will also [take away gun licences for domestic abusers, limit gun magazine capacity and increase criminal penalties for gun smugglers and traffickers](#). This move by government follows in the wake of white supremacy-

motivated mass shooting of 13 people in [Buffalo](#), NY, the murder of 19 children and 2 teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, TX, USA, and [more](#) mass killings since these two violent events took place.

Knowing Canadian children and families do not live outside of such painful and complicated conversations, we invite consideration about ethical practice when the issue of gun violence comes up. What are our roles and pedagogical responsibilities in the moment a young child wants to ‘play guns’? Is it to immediately shut it down? Engage children in deeper conversations about what is happening and what all children and educators in the group require to feel safe? Such moments of tension are messy, complex, and not easily resolved.

What is our response and responsibility as educators when faced with places of discomfort; what is an “ethical” response? Are we child centred when we dismiss children’s interest in superhero play or weapons? What does child centred mean? [And what gets lost by focusing solely on ‘the individual child’ instead of stepping back to look more broadly at what type of world we are contributing to creating?] What is our role, our ethical role in this dilemma? What type of questions and issues are children struggling with when they explore these and other issues? (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015, pp. 183-184)

Despite tendencies in Canada to [see ourselves as less violent and racist than our neighbours to the south](#), as Indigenous, Black, and other racialized peoples have pointed out, in this country, we are, in fact, implicated in gun proliferation, racially motivated violence, and mass shootings, in complicated ways. What are our obligations to the fact that [Canada was the 4th-largest importer of American revolvers and pistols in 2021?](#) What about families who rely on hunting for sustenance as part of cultural practice on the land? How do we meet them in complicated moments of ‘learning to live well together in practice’?

Furthermore, whose perspectives do we draw on when confronted with difficult political questions with young children and families in everyday practice? While certainly challenging, engaging with children and families, and with colleagues and others in the community, on contemporary issues and events that come up, brings us into the ethical space of working collectively to grapple with the now of what’s in front of us.

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