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Pedagogy and Pedagogists in Early Childhood Education

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Kathleen Kummen

This issue tells some stories about the work that took place in the past year within the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) and the First Nations Pedagogies Network (FNPN). These stories, written by early childhood educators, community and post-secondary pedagogists, and ECPN and FNPN directors, weave within and through the world's current conditions. They reflect the difficulties of living in pandemic times amid the challenging inheritances of settler colonialism, the struggles against anti-Black and other forms of racism to honour Black Lives Matter, and the ongoing catastrophic climate events, among other crises. The intention of this issue is to share these situated, ongoing, partial, and incomplete stories. Some of the stories relate pedagogical projects, others share experiences, some narrate early childhood centres' journeys, and others speak of transformational possibilities.

As a brief introduction to the issue, we would like to tell a story that acquaints the reader with the ECPN and traces the history of the newly introduced role of the pedagogist. We conclude by discussing how the ECPN pedagogical work supports Canada's (and more specifically BC's) current move toward a public early childhood education system. While this introduction gives readers a background to the ECPN to

contextualize the rest of the articles in this issue, our website (www.ecpn.ca) provides a rich overview of the ECPN's complex structure.

The ECPN is funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and was established in 2018 to coordinate a provincial network of pedagogists to serve communities by supporting early childhood educators in BC. The ECPN builds on the work of two earlier MCFD-funded projects: (1) the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project, which operated in three communities in BC from 2011 to 2018, and (2) the province-wide Investigating Quality (IQ) Project learning circles from 2006 to 2011 (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Hodgins, 2021). Using a collaborative network approach, the ECPN is implementing the role of pedagogist across BC through two interconnected streams—the community stream and the post-secondary institution stream—working directly with our partner the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC). The ECPN also walks alongside its sister network, the First Nations Pedagogies Network, led by ECPN partner the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. Like other early years initiatives (e.g., Early Childhood Collaboratory www.earlychildhoodcollaboratory.net and Common Worlds Research Collective <https://commonworlds.net/>), the

ECPN embraces and builds on national and global frameworks like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) Calls to Action and the United Nations (2007) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Through these collaborations, the ECPN creates spaces for vibrant public conversations about pedagogical projects and processes that matter to early childhood communities in BC by:

- Promoting early education as a public responsibility and democratic right.
- Advancing the rights and well-being of BC's Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.
- Providing BC children opportunities to participate in a democratic society.
- Bringing BC children, families, and early education professionals together in purposeful, mutually beneficial learning situations.
- Enhancing the implementation of the BC Early Learning Framework.
- Supporting the recruitment, retention, and professional growth of the province's ECEs.
- Creating a well-connected culture of practice among educators at every stage in their professional development (i.e., student educators, entry-to-practice, long-term).
- Developing and disseminating insights about pedagogies that will enhance critical understand-

ings of early childhood education and support educators.

- Promoting cross-sector relationship building and resource development that will support policymakers' and government officials' current and future efforts to integrate early education with children's services.
- Improving public policy.
- Placing BC at the forefront of early learning child care policy in Canada and beyond.

The main intention of the ECPN is to support pedagogical work in BC early childhood education centres throughout the province's five health regions through the role of the pedagogist. Following the ECPN's introduction of the term *pedagogist*, the BC Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2019, p. 7) adopted the role in 2019. Inspired by the Italian *pedagogista tradition*, the term pedagogist has been formulated by a group of early childhood education scholars in Canada. Pedagogists support ECEs to implement the BC Early Learning Framework and to design, execute, and evaluate meaningful pedagogy within their early childhood education programs. Pedagogists are vital provocateurs who enact situated, dialogical, and transformative pedagogical projects in early childhood centres. They enact these projects by co-constructing curriculum with educators and children.

The implementation of the pedagogist role began in January 2019 with 10 community and seven post-secondary institution pedagogists. The ECPN now employs 30 community pedagogists working with 317 early childhood programs and 1,228 educators across the prov-

ince's five health regions. Within the post-secondary institution stream, 11 pedagogists are currently working with 33 early childhood programs, 154 educators, and 130 early childhood education students. The early childhood centres that are involved with the ECPN range from home child care to large and small centres, both for profit and not for profit, situated in urban, rural, and remote locations. Generally, a pedagogist works within a cluster of approximately 45 educators, some with only one large centre and others with multiple centres. In some communities, pedagogists also offer community gatherings, reaching educators outside of their clusters who are interested in thinking together to respond to current conditions. Some of the articles in this issue tell stories about these gatherings.

ECPN pedagogists are grounded in values of democracy, social justice, and experimentation. From this standpoint, early care and learning centres are democratic public forums for collaborative undertakings, including the articulation of common goals and frames. For instance, local communities collectively articulate and make visible their "image of the child" so that multiple and diverse perspectives are freely discussed. To work toward social justice, early care and learning centres recognize, for example, the right of Indigenous communities to have early years programs "that are led by Indigenous peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages, and supported by strong partnerships of holistic, accessible and flexible programming that is inclusive of the needs and aspirations of Indigenous children and families" (Her Majesty

the Queen in Right of Canada, 2018, p. 5). And, to uphold the value of experimentation, early care and learning centres are public forums where children—supported by educators, their families, and their communities—meet to undertake diverse and innovative projects. These centres are spaces where children are invited "to invent, to think differently, to imagine and try out different ways of doing things" (Moss, 2014, p. 132).

The ECPN is unquestionably a necessary project for moving forward a public early childhood education system in the province and beyond. As research shows, an early childhood education system requires a strong educational and pedagogical commitment (see Early Childhood Collaboratory Network, 2020). The ECPN is committed to continue working in partnership with early childhood educators, ECEBC, government, and other agencies to create pedagogical spaces for young children and their families. We take seriously our responsibility to engage with pedagogies that bring about possibilities for more livable worlds.

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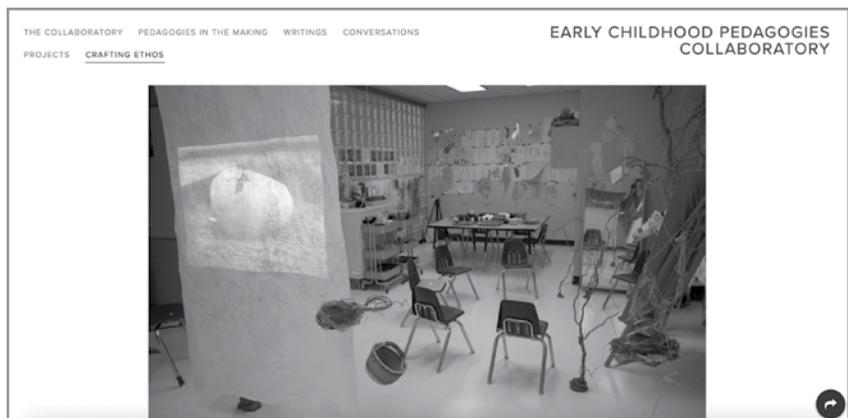
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Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Kathleen Kummen are co-directors of the ECPN, a network walking with educators and others across the lands now known as British Columbia. We acknowledge that these lands are the unceded traditional territories of First Nations peoples and home to many Métis.



Websites of the The First Nations Pedagogies Network, Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory, and Early Childhood Pedagogy Network.