
2020 ECPN Pedagogist Review

Pedagogical Beginnings

Veronica McLean and ECPN Directors

An educator once said to me that *what we pay attention to grows*. Over the past year since starting in my role as pedagogist with the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network, I have been paying attention to **beginnings**, specifically, how to begin well, and begin well *again*.

Beginning conversations, beginning relationships, beginning jobs, beginning presentations, beginning writing projects, beginning journeys. We might wonder why it matters to pay attention to the idea of beginnings. Why might they be important? Paying attention to our beginnings asks us to think about *how* we begin, *when* and *where* we begin. For the pedagogist, beginnings take on a particularly resonant tone, as the “first step in the intentional production of meaning” (Said, 1975, p. 5). And it is only in retrospect, Edward Said says, that we recognize these moments as beginnings—situated in histories, entangled with remembering, thinking, and responding in particular ways.

In joining the ECPN as a new pedagogist, I am learning to attend to these histories and memories, paying close attention to the meanings and ideas that are privileged and those that are silenced. My colleagues and I underwent an ECPN orientation period that asked us to question why it matters to pay attention to difference and the nuanced meanings in between one thing and another. To reconsider difference, and to stay with the tension with/in difference, not as way to make room for it, but to grasp that it is this *being in this room*—this coexisting within this space—that is the condition for creating lively encounters, new narratives, new beginnings with/in a more livable world. In taking up this pedagogist role, I am beginning to attend to questions that ask: What ideas, feelings, and curiosities do we want to nurture that respond to the present times we are living in? What attunements must we attend to that will embrace difference as the conditions for all bodies in all spaces to live today?

In the midst of a pandemic of global proportions, we have, as Bruno Latour notes, *an opportunity to see if we can imagine in advance what we want to keep*, pay attention to and nurture (2020, p. 4). In taking up the role of a pedagogist, I enter into these spaces with attunement and intention, knowing that these histories—the narratives therein—create the conditions for beginning, and for beginning again. Engaging in deep conversations with early childhood educators in my community requires thinking *care-fully* (Land et al., 2020) about our next steps, about how we will continue to walk together collectively in virtual spaces as friends, colleagues, peers—and how we will create a space for agreement and difference to coexist. Thinking with Latour’s invitation to name what we want to keep also asks us to question what we will need to let go of. How can we create the conditions to express our grief and to mourn alongside reimagining other possibilities?

The story of COVID-19 is embedded in a multiplicity of meanings, experiences, histories, memories, and voices—some privileged while many others are silenced. Thinking pedagogically, we may ask how we can give audience to these stories, to slow down and hear multiple voices, while ensuring we continue to move, to gaze beyond—always—to what is possible. In this way, we attune to the stories of managers, directors, and owners of childcare centres who must grapple with decisions that

affect today and tomorrow. We pay attention to the narratives of early childhood educators who are living with/in everyday tensions, enforcing wellness policies and COVID-19 protocols, monitoring constant handwashing, mask wearing, and social distancing alongside the pernicious responsibility of determining whether a sneeze is just a sneeze or if a sore throat is just a sore throat. We attend to the stories of families balancing entangled obligations with/in the complexities of demand, expectation, and responsibility. Amid all these stories are the stories of children and how COVID-19 is showing up in their play, their narratives, how they are navigating the virus's meaning, and how these stories are disrupting our universalized ideas of who children are, what childhood is, and what the purpose of early childhood education is. Our collective stories of the quiet discontent that lives alongside our daily endeavours to “normalize” routines, tasks, and activities bump up against discourses of a “new normal” embraced as the stories of today, the stories of living in a pandemic—as if it's only this virus that has damaged or threatens our current ways of living and being in the world. How can we resist the lure to “normalcy,” of falling back on what was, what's familiar and known, and instead stay with the tension of our yearnings for something more, our ideas of something other (Haraway, 1988, 2016; Taylor, 2018; Todd, 2001, 2015)?

I see my role as a pedagogist as creating conditions to attune to and pick up these traces, to hold onto the threads and move beyond the familiar, paying attention and slowing down, attending to ideas and meaning that will create the otherwise possibilities for which we yearn. To ask: *If* pedagogy is about creating—about creation and creativity (Moss, 2014; Vintimilla, 2014; Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020)—what new meaning and ideas of goodness, equity, freedom, and liberation can we create in these times that can question what it means to live well with “all world relations” (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 15)—both today, in the time of COVID-19, and beyond? What ideas can we create that begin to rewrite and enact pedagogy, curriculum, and thinking within early childhood education and care that are lively, joyful, and transformative (Moss, 2014; Taylor, 2018; Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020)—and that move us toward livability for all?

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