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# 2020 ECPN Pedagogist Review

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## Change for a Pedagogist: An ECPN Reflective Report

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The Man with the Blue Guitar, by Wallace Stevens (excerpt)

They said, “you have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are.”  
The man replied, “Things as they are  
Are changed upon the blue guitar.”  
And they said then, “but play, you must,”  
A tune beyond us, yet, ourselves,  
A tune upon the blue guitar  
Of things exactly as they are.”

In this reflective report, we offer some insights into our understanding of the process of becoming a faculty pedagogist with the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN). The newly introduced role of pedagogist has transformed the shared early childhood spaces we inhabit with educators, students, children, and colleagues in a variety of communities, each with their own complex histories and stories. This change has meant questioning some key assumptions, dominant discourses, and particular orientations within early childhood education. Peter Moss (2019) thinks alongside scholars Giles Deleuze, Liselott Mariett Olsson and Emmanuel Levinas to contest commonly held stories of early childhood education and asks us to consider multiple perspectives. He invites us to critically reflect on dominant discourses that suggest learning is formulaic and knowledge sharing is a transmission that is stable and predictable. Because particular narratives influence dominant discourses, we are concerned by the dominant narratives that expect educators to “apply existing ideas to confirm our existing thinking” and to create subjects that are knowable, familiar and expected. Alternative narratives remind us that “learning is always a relational practice” (Moss, 2019, p. 110). In understanding learning as relational, we ask how we might live well together in the world within learning practices that consider particular contexts and unsettle our beliefs and values (Government of British Columbia, 2019).

In our roles as pedagogists, we are creating places of disruption that acknowledge epistemological multiplicities, asking what else might exist in the in-between with educators, practicum students, colleagues, and communities. This is not a tidy process. We explore how ideas can elevate, agitate, or generate new interpretations about living well and learning together. Below, each of us offers a brief

reflection of how we are sitting, as faculty pedagogists, with new understandings of living well together within early childhood education. Together these short vignettes may offer some insight into how the role of the pedagogist is shaping the work of postsecondary early childhood education programs in British Columbia.

### **Living alongside – Jessica Fee**

*I am looking at change through a new lens today....*

In learning with this small group of faculty pedagogists, I am invited to collect a trace of what it means to learn to become a faculty pedagogist. The trace we collectively pick up and follow is a collective interest we share – a disposition to understand early childhood processes of change or *becoming*. Through conversation we begin to unpack the unsettling nature of change, and it becomes clear that the notion of change, or becoming, is significant to understanding the role of the faculty pedagogist within early childhood education. I believe this work as a pedagogist is not about “fixing” or solving problems in early childhood centres, or about determining in advance who children (and, by extension, educators) will become. It is, however, about creating conditions that allow us to reconfigure how we think about being together and learn to reimagine the world(s) we inhabit.

In conversation and spaces with colleagues and community, I think a lot about how learning lives in embodied *doing*. This reference helps me to reconsider ways that challenge key developmental “truths” or assumptions that are dominant in early childhood education (Simpson, 2014, p. 6).

Critically reflecting helps make us accountable to our pedagogical choices, including the developmental language we choose to use (or not use) alongside educators, students and our faculties. Thinking about change in these ways allows me to think about *how* we invite thinking together, and how that might influence change or growth. Burman’s words (2016) articulate why creating conditions for critical engagement offers opportunities to create a more just and livable community – opportunities that have not yet been given a place to exist.

Language is a key expression of cultural practice, and I want to argue that the apparently general accounts developmental psychological theories offer are not so at all. Rather they are deeply culturally embedded records of particular times and places. Or, more specifically, they are records of a dominant culture, but ones that have acquired such prevalence and predominance as to have become invisible, or presumed. This is why the agenda of attending to complexity, diversity and multiplicity has arisen: to counter the globalization of one specific model of children's development (Burman, 2016, p. 7).

### **Unravelling – Michelle Pierce**

As a new faculty pedagogist I found myself questioning what my role would be. As I introduced the idea to child care programs, I was asked questions like: What will you do? What is the purpose? I had to resist the temptation to find the right answer. Instead I sat in the discomfort of uncertainty. As Moss

(2014) explains, staying with this discomfort can be positive when we recognize uncertainty as constantly moving and allowing space for possibilities. I understand my role to be co-constructing knowledge with early childhood educators, students, children, families and community, in a particular place and time. There is no way of knowing what this process will look like. In a neoliberal society our focus on outcomes limits individuals' drives and desires. It would be naive of me to pretend that I approach the role of a faculty pedagogist with innocence or without prejudice. I was educated in a system based on Eurocentric values with a focus on developmental psychology. I was taught, and still teach, the importance of meeting children's needs. However, as Burman (2016) states, "needs reflect children as passive, to be serviced, protected and provided for rather than to be engaged with as active participants" (p. 73). This new way of thinking is unravelling my understanding of "best practices" in early childhood education. I wonder about what our ECCE program is teaching students, and to what purpose? What kind of early childhood educator are we trying to produce? How is what faculty are teaching relevant to the conditions of our time? Pedagogy is about dialogue; through co-constructing knowledge change will occur, and this knowledge change will be constantly moving as new relationships and ideas form.

When I first thought about being a faculty pedagogist, I was excited to disrupt the status quo and create change. However, I needed to become aware of and admit my own biases and judgments. Was I planning to take one dominant discourse and replace it with another? My values influence the conversations I engage in, the materials I choose to bring in and even what I observe and reflect upon. If I come to a program as an "expert," I am using a power-over approach, as if convincing early childhood educators to practice a particular way. Although my intention is not to engage child care programs with any superiority, in my role as an ECCE instructor, a power dynamic is already in play.

Reflecting on my work over the last year alongside children and early childhood educators, I recall conversations with staff that are also documented in pedagogical narrations we created. Through this documentation I was able to engage and discuss the thoughts and feelings of staff members. Power dynamics became a theme as one educator openly shared her fear of saying the wrong thing. She admitted to being intimidated by having an instructor on the floor and felt I was modelling "the right way" of being with the children. What is the right way? Who defines that? Again, the outcome of change becomes the focus, rather than being in a state of change. As a team we began discussing and noticing power roles in the program. How does the language we use and the way we set up the environment, routines and activities foster power roles in the centre? Are power roles necessary? How do we interpret the word power? While these conversations have currently been paused as a result of the pandemic, which has shut down the centre and sent us home to social distance, they leave me with some persistent thoughts as a faculty pedagogist. I am unsettled by the realization that despite my initial plan to "disrupt the status quo" in my work with the centre, this pandemic holds power in its own right and makes evident that we must take seriously the idea that change is not a set outcome but is always responding to the evolving conditions of the times.

## Disorientation – Cheryl Cameron

A willingness to reconsider held beliefs and understandings seems a necessary disposition as faculty pedagogist. This process of my becoming cannot be easily defined. The moment I grasp a definitive answer about pedagogical practices or my role as faculty pedagogist, I am no longer living with the possibility of what might be otherwise. In thinking alongside scholarly readings and through dialogue with colleagues, a practice of critical reflection is ongoing. Maxine Greene suggests:

Only when the given or the taken for granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is – contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense. (2000, p. 23)

Dominant discourses around developmental theory and their implications within early childhood education are questioned as an area of concern. What might be seen anew through a process of deconstructing the foundational training offered by developmental psychology? In thinking with Erica Burman (2016), developmental psychology suggests that a child is a subject who is somehow incomplete or immature and in need of intervention. Early childhood educators are often encouraged to intervene in order to regulate or improve children's behaviour, guided by regulatory systems that stem from developmental theory. I wonder about the ways particular interventions are considered and how this might strengthen particular stories or images of the child. Is it possible that through the lens of developmental psychology we cast a shadow of deficiency on children's abilities? In what ways does this perspective contradict the image of a child who is capable and full of potential (Government of British Columbia, 2019)? Early childhood institutions have been constructed with the goal to ready a child for school, with a focus on increased autonomy (Dahlberg et al., 2013).

Where is value placed within relationships and context when children are being prepared for future selves? How are we responding to the children as they are today, as citizens together in the world with concerns, hopes and dreams? With a focus on a child's independence, the contextual relationships and space for attending to each other is secondary when autonomy is the goal or measure. Is it possible to think beyond a developmental lens, concerned for the capacity of the individual child? Where are there spaces to think differently in early childhood education, shifting concern and interest for collective lives over singularity? This shift can be disorienting and uncomfortable when dominant views overpower the majority, where a consensus brand of democracy silences alternative voices and maintains the dominant idea. We are reminded that "conflict and disturbance force us to revise our interpretive models and theories on reality, and this is true for both children and adults" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 126). Because of this disturbance, colleagues and pedagogists in becoming embrace discomfort to act and ask again, what revisions to our long-held practice in ECEC can be considered? Moss (2019) describes democratic professionalism as "comfortable with working collaboratively and non-hierarchically with others; supportive of democratic methods of managing the school in all its aspects,

pedagogical as well as administrative”, where democratic professionalism refers to one who “welcomes diversity of values recognizing, welcoming and respecting diversity, of values, of ideas, of understandings” (p. 78). Our pedagogical conversations and concerns give rise to alternate stories, often uncovering something silenced by the dominance of another held belief. What stories exist beyond those concerned with the child as an incomplete subject? Disoriented and disturbed, I attempt to shift again, to reorient with the opportunity to think together with colleagues, scholars and fellow ECPN faculty pedagogists. I remain unsettled.

### **New Patterns – Trena Hebert**

The idea of becoming a pedagogist was exciting for me – I could feel change emerge from the mere title. I had no idea what the role would entail, but I was fascinated and ready to learn something new. For me, the role has been an evolving one of thinking and creating new patterns. Thinking with Victor Turner (1987), I am sitting with the provocation to see this role as “undoing, dissolution, decomposition . . . accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformation of old elements into new patterns” (p. 9).

It is fortuitous that the pedagogist role is rolling out in BC at this time. Thinking with the Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2019) and working with students, educators, children and other pedagogists sparks intriguing dialogue regarding where to critically make pedagogical decisions about what we as a society want to nurture and what needs to change. At this moment, being a faculty pedagogist involves bringing to our faculty team new possibilities about how we think about the courses we teach, the curriculum we offer, and the way we educate students. It has also meant connecting differently with centres, educators and students to speculate and to be with – and to wonder about our motives/actions as educators – what drives us, what motivates us, what influences us. Bringing this curiosity to my faculty allows us/me to reimagine my role, to rethink how we are with one another and to reinvigorate our expectations of students and educators.

### **Making the Familiar Strange and the Strange Familiar – Bo Sun Kim**

Pedagogist work is commonly misunderstood as bringing change into early childhood contexts, and seeing educators, children and institutions as objects of the change. However, change for a pedagogist is not an instrumental shift of trying to provide a different solution to solve a problem. Nor is it replacing one solution with another, as if there is always a particular resolution for any trouble (Haraway, 2016). The desire to apply a solution, ignoring the complexity of uncontrollable, unmonitorable and unmanageable aspects of the problem, runs the risk of closing possibilities and preventing openings.

As with any new way of imagining early childhood education, change for a pedagogist requires questioning the insistence on the status quo and making the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Greene, 1995). It is an invitation into a world of diverse forms of living and being within our

pedagogical project. In this regard, a pedagogist needs to question the conditions of our time – *this* time, here and now (Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020). We must recognize that our present time is not separate from our past and upcoming future, and that we are connected, interdependent and shaped with each other.

Alexis Shotwell (2016) argues that how people engaged with worlds in the past affects our present and offers to us in the form of our present lives. Attending to the present moment means looking at what brought us to this place. Asking what got us to the present we live in is an important question, one that requires understanding that the present is contingent, a product of history and of the choices people made. As Shotwell asserts, looking at how we came to be here offers hope, because we can envision other possibilities for living and being and make other choices – possibly envisaging a different future than the one we have inherited. Thus, one of the vital works of a pedagogist is to unsettle the all too familiar and static understandings of the early childhood education project, providing some openings for thinking about livable possibilities and how things could be otherwise (Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020).

In short, change for a pedagogist involves grappling with pedagogical and ethical questions to cultivate different modes of living, approaches and perspectives that might enable people to think differently. In doing so, a pedagogist offers the opportunity to enter into a new dialogue with others. The work of a pedagogist is committing oneself to keep the possibilities open (Haraway, 2016) and make change continuous by cultivating interconnections and interruptions.

### **Unfinished Wonderings**

We hope the insights offered by ECPN faculty pedagogists convey change as transformational, unsettling, unpredictable, contextual, and evolutionary. We share our concerns for collective life and our commitments to seeking multiple possibilities in early childhood education and care. Possibilities may be revealed and become evident but may dissolve with the next dominant story unless we remain willing to seek alternative stories, ask ethical questions and take responsibility for making new choices. Through our roles as ECPN faculty pedagogists, we have shared in critical reflection, together and within our institutions and early childhood communities. Through our evolving uncertainty, we nurture an awareness of histories, perspectives, and the entanglement of dominant discourses. Our wonderings are unfinished, but we think of the role of change as a process of living, being, and thinking.

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