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The Here and Now: Reimagining Early Childhoods In Urgent Times

Diversity and Inclusion: Ethical Obligations

In this month's issue, we continue the call for reimagining the Role of the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) in British Columbia put forth by the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) and extend the conversation in our work that responds to diverse contexts, communities and settings. As witnessed in the tragic and violent events unfolding in Israel and Gaza since October 7, 2023, the world is a rapidly changing place. What conditions and dispositions do educators need to cultivate to meet the realities, complexities and inequities in the lives of children and families?

This invitation to think with ECEBC's position paper on the role of the educator in B.C. is a direct response to current events in the world. All of us at the ECPN express profound sadness at the violence and loss of lives in Israel and Gaza. We condemn the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and will continue to work in ways that actively and overtly oppose racism and all forms of oppression.

We are also responding to troubling events in our own province.

Posters recently distributed in the Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Vancouver region promote racism. These "whites-only moms and tots" posters exemplify white supremacist ideologies targeting families and young children. These posters are a poignant reminder that children confront systemic and personal racism in their daily experiences and are directly impacted and influenced by historical and ongoing violences. Our responsibility as educators is to actively disrupt practices that maintain normative whiteness, and to transform early childhood education as spaces that honour Indigenous children, Black children and children from racial and cultural minorities (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2023).

> *Current research asserts social policies and narratives maintain our profession as gendered, racialized, marginalized and positioned as a secondary market force. However, we know that early childhood educators are not limited by these narratives and images. (ECEBC, 2022)*

Educators are not strangers to social inequities. We are a diverse field: 95% of early childhood educators identify as women, 33% identify as immigrants or nonpermanent residents and 5% identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit (Massing, Lirette, & Paquette, 2022). As a gendered, racialized and often economically disadvantaged professional group, how do we stand in solidarity to resist perpetuating status-quo inequity and suppression? What is required of us to actively cocreate workspaces that disrupt the hegemony of whiteness and Euro-Western values? Have we as a collective work team of educators talked openly and generatively about racism? Have we thought together about how we will call each other out on acts and statements of racism in order to create spaces where all educators are valued?

> *Educators are leaders and hopeful for a better future, without knowing the shape of that future. Educators are emboldened to disrupt the legacies of the past in order to activate transformative change for the future. (ECEBC, 2022)*

While the concept of inclusion is widely accepted in early childhood education, implementing it requires a pedagogical approach and conscious steps to work against racism and exclusion in early childhood education. ECEBC (2022) reminds us that as educators we are leaders whose role is to actively disrupt the legacies of the past to activate transformative change. But transformative for whom? On whose backs is so-called transformation taking place? Can we joyfully commit to doing differently in ways that actually lay the groundwork for change?

Fostering an inclusive education requires us to become aware of our biases and privileges and to educate ourselves on the histories and ongoing practices that silence and marginalize certain

people. This involves asking each other difficult questions, not to critique our colleagues but to reimagine other ways of doing things and thereby create liveable worlds for all.

What responsibilities do educators hold in confronting racism and other hate narratives that may be fraught with tensions?

How can educators effectively tackle the underlying issues of these concerns and advocate for systemic changes that facilitate equitable education?

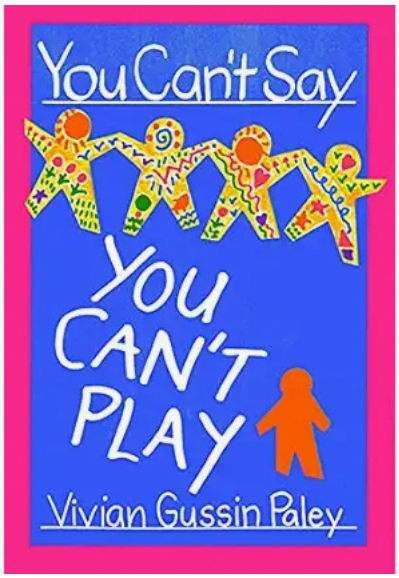
To work against anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Blackness, racist and other hate narratives, educators need to do more than bring in an array of multicultural books, images and materials. Educators must confront racism in early childhood spaces and engage in practices that embrace diversity in a manner that transcends shallow multicultural approaches. Typical multicultural approaches tend to emphasize surface-level customs that stereotype and rigidly define children's cultural identities instead of engaging with the intricacies of racial and cultural interactions (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2023). We can no longer earmark a special day to celebrate diversity; instead, we need to live in the difficulties, challenges and joys of diversity, where diversity, inclusion and difference are not concepts but ways of being with others. This is difficult work, as it requires us (educators, systems, government, societies as a whole) to welcome children and families without first placing on them provisional requirements for inclusion. While conversations around inclusion often focus on the importance of belonging and acceptance, in practice, the emphasis often leans toward politeness rather than directly addressing and combatting structural biases and discrimination (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2023).

How can educators nurture the conditions that support children's active engagement within their world without perpetuating narratives of hate found in heteronormativity, settler colonialism and racial prejudices? How might inviting a pedagogist into your centre make space for the complex conversations and dialogue necessary to reimagine our practices in the 21st century?

In relationship with children, families, communities, materials and places, educators engage in intentional pedagogical work in response to the complexity of our current conditions. Early childhood education is a space to co-create new worlds with alternative narratives. *(ECEBC, 2022)*

The ECPN reminds our readers that young children live in the world, and the events of the world permeate early years centres. As educators, we are called to engage in practices that respond to the events in children's immediate lives and the world.

Provocations for Collective Action



These timeless books invite the reader to take a second look at play and the role of the educator in children's play. Readers are asked to consider how play is political and often enact narratives of racism and discrimination that promote exclusion.

Visit advocate websites to learn more about what is possible when we come together to fight racism and hate.

Orange Shirt Society invites each of us to act each day on a path to truth and reconciliation.

Black Lives Matter works to "actively dismantle all forms of anti-Black racism, liberate Blackness, support Black healing, affirm Black existence, and create freedom to love and self-determine" (Black Lives Matter, "About Us")

The Ministry of Education in British Columbia provides inclusive education resources that aim to create equitable and diverse learning environments for all students, including those with disabilities.

One of these resources is the Inclusive Child Care Toolkit provided by the province, which offers invaluable guidance to educators. This toolkit gives educators practical strategies, resources and practices to promote inclusivity in early childhood education settings. It is a comprehensive resource that can be seamlessly integrated into daily practice, further empowering educators to create inclusive environments.

Other resources, including the Ministry of Education and Childcare website for sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and the SOGI 123 BC curriculum website, highlight the importance of recognizing and valuing the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities while

protecting individuals from discrimination and harm. These websites address important considerations for inclusive education, such as visibility, protection and equitable treatment. They also offer best practices, including using inclusive language, ensuring safety, respecting self-identification, maintaining confidentiality and promoting gender-integrated activities. You can find examples of school district policies and procedures and valuable links to organizations and tools to support 2SLGBTQI+ students and create inclusive school communities.

Continuing the Conversation

We encourage all educators to follow the work of Grace Lore, the Minister of State for Child Care, in her leadership and advocacy in supporting the rights of 2SLGBTQI+ people on social media at @GraceALore.

We also extend, once again, the invitation to read the statement on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in education of Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education and Child Care and education partners.

As always, we encourage our readers to visit the ECPN website to engage with the work of educators, children and pedagogists across the province and to learn about upcoming events.

Join the Conversation

ECPN Community Offerings

For upcoming and ongoing events, please follow the links below. To stay up to date with ECPN's events and news, subscribe to our website.

Conversation VII: X is for Elsa and O is for Anna: Letters That Tell Stories

November 28th, 2023 | 6:30pm–7:30pm PDT | Zoom

Join ECPN pedagogist Maria Jeong in conversation with ECPN director Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and ECPN pedagogical coordinator Meagan Montpetit as they discuss a pedagogical project that reimagines children's writing as a social practice. This conversation will share what might be possible when we, as adults, take children's writing practices seriously by noticing how letters hold special significance for children in collectively storying their world.

See Details

INCOMMUNICATION & Listening in a Complex World: With David Cecchetto

December 13th, 2023| 6:30pm–7:30pm PDT | Zoom

This offering is an invitation to trouble the dominant idea of communication as an exchange of information within a "seemingly systematic world." We will engage with questions such as: What is it to be in communication? What kind of experience might listening entail? How might we think about "listening as (in)attention to a particular incommunicational economy"? What is the relation between listening and incommunication? How might we think about the relation between listening and sound?

See Details

ECPN Highlights

Becoming Intimate with Place

A group of early childhood professionals who live in or near Houston, B.C., came together with ECPN pedagogist Chelsea Hann for the first session of a three-part series that aims to experiment with materials and documentation methods while exploring the local Houston landscape. Each session, held on the land, focuses on exploring how locally responsive early childhood curriculum and pedagogy practices can foster deep relationships with the place and community.

Creating Conditions for Slow Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education Reading & Conversation Series

The Early Childhood Pedagogy Network, in collaboration with Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops ECEBC Branch, and the Kamloops CCRR Program, is offering a monthly reading and conversation circle for early years professionals in the Tk'emlúps/Kamloops region. They are engaging with the book *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child* by Alison Clark (Routledge,

2023) and focusing on how thinking with slow pedagogies might inform their practice and inspire transformative early childhood education in local contexts.

We are excited to showcase how educators and pedagogists respond to the challenges of living well with others in early childhood education across British Columbia.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for updates.

The Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) is the governing body of the B.C. government-funded Early Childhood Pedagogist Program, a provincial network of pedagogists that serves communities by supporting the ongoing professional learning of early childhood educators (ECEs) in B.C.