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ECE Voices

In Memoriam

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ABOVE PHOTO: Staff of Compass Early Learning Centre participate in Nov 30 Day of Action activities.

Photo Credit: Compass Early Learning Centre

COVER PHOTO: ECEs display the "Worth More" parachute following press conference at Toronto City Hall.

Photo Credit: Jesse Mintz, CUPE Ontario

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What Kind of Ancestor Do You Hope to Be: Responses to Elder Brenda Mason Part 2

AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation

Elder Brenda's beautiful and meaningful piece: *What kind of Ancestor do you hope to be?* was published in the Fall/Winter 2022 issue. The questions asked by Elder Brenda Mason, "What kind of imprints am I leaving?" and "What kind of footprints do I want to leave for those that are coming behind me?" are essential for self-reflection and human growth. They encourage us to consider how our words, actions, and behaviours impact others and how we can positively influence the people and the World around us.

The Committee asked for responses to these questions, which were published in the Spring/Summer 2023 issue, and we are pleased to publish Part 2 of the responses, which will finalize this collection.

In our final submission part two, we are honoured and very grateful to have a written contribution by Inuit Elder Ina Kuluguqtuq Zakal where she contemplates the kind of ancestor she will be—sharing that she will be someone leaving behind not just lessons from the past, but joyous moments for the future. She is rooted in pride and strength, sharing cultural stories and turning memories into lasting inspiration for generations. As she invites colleagues into her world, from snowy seal hunting scenes to the warmth of a qulliq-lit room, she empowers them to be sharers of Inuit knowledge, fostering a legacy of celebration and pride.

Becoming Ancestor

Ina Kuluguqtuq Zakal

In thinking about the kind of ancestor I want to be, I know that I want to leave something fun.

Something children and youth can enjoy. What happened in the past, happened in the past. We can learn from the past and we can look forward to the future in a good way. Make it more fun.

I am proud and strong. I want to share my culture and knowledge with joy from a place that is both strong and fun.

From my ancestors I heard and hold stories that I learned, based on our real lived experiences. I use this learning to make activities in the classroom. The ideas come from the past and the content is lived in the present. The past and present experiences are the same and different.

The children love me when I am not just talking. The children love me when: I am moving, I am acting, I am storytelling, I am showing. For example, I remember, being dressed in a parka with snow pants, ready to go seal hunting. The children see my clothing, they see me. This is a time when all the staff, without an invitation, come to my room, to watch and learn.

In that moment, as the children and teachers watch, I have gone back to my childhood, when my dad, taught me to seal hunt. I act out looking for the small seal. I dramatize looking for the lake. I feel my dad, in my memory.

In that moment I give my co-workers permission to try living cultural knowledge. Some want to try, and some want to watch. Then I give my knowledge to my co-workers both Inuit and non-Inuit, to take what they have learned from me and to use this knowledge in their work with children.

Through my work, I am giving tools and permission to my colleagues to becomes sharers of Inuit knowledge.

Recently, I visited a teacher in the toddler room, where the qulliq was shining bright. There were no Inuit in the room. The RECE smiled at me with pride, and I knew I had done something good.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this series. The committee aims to foster a diverse and inclusive dialogue that can contribute to meaningful change and reconciliation. To connect with the guiding committee please email info@aeceo.ca.

For more information: https://www.aeceo.ca/ecelink_articles

THE IMPACT OF A TRANSFORMATIVE CONFERENCE

Follow up from: Building a Transformative Conference

"The various, non-typical topics and activities in a professional learning event, from sharing songs or jokes and making memes to belonging through a joyful representation, speaks loudly to me that any and every aspect of our lives as humans has a space in our growth as professionals. I liked myself more and let go of a good chunk of my insecurities and self-shaming."
- Conference Participant

Introduction

Conference attendance and presentation are practices found everywhere across professional communities, but not often are their impact and implications widely shared. In general, attending a professional conference is assumed to have a positive impact on practice. Given the substantial cost and effort involved in planning a conference, it is important to understand the nature of conference impacts, so that both conference attendees and administrators can reflect on how to best generate meaningful learning. With this in mind, the AECEO staff worked with an external evaluation consultant and a team of three ECE research consultants to develop an evaluation plan for our 2023 Provincial Conference. In collaboration with the AECEO team, the research team created surveys to share with attendees and presenters to gain an understanding of their experience. They also carefully developed an interview guide and held focus groups with the conference committee members to learn more about their experience planning and participating in the conference. From these, anonymous survey and interview data were collected to examine conference committee members', attendees', presenters', and administrators' perceived impacts. Findings reveal it was incredibly impactful for ECEs to attend a professional learning event where the focus was on educators rather than the practice. Attendees shared that they were immersed in feelings of engagement, belonging, well-being, and expression. As educators these foundations are at the core of our work with children, however, more often than not, we do not view these foundations as being central to our personal wellbeing. By providing a conference that aims to raise each other up, the AECEO recognizes the importance of understanding how the four foundations are necessary in supporting the well-being of the educator as a whole person.

Background

In April 2023, the AECEO Provincial Conference; We Raise Each Other Up provided a virtual space for educators from across Ontario to come together in learning and community. It was a conference that was planned and created by ECEs, where all presentations were by ECEs, and topics focused on ECEs themselves rather than the practice of early childhood education. To read more about how this unique conference came to be, check out the previous Spring/Summer 2023 eceLINK for the article Building a Transformative Conference.

Impact of Focusing on the Educator & Educators as Presenters

The energy that was shared in this virtual space was palpable. The conference committee's decision to have the conference focus on the educator and not on practice was a significant decision. It completely changed the conference from being a "typical" conference and put it on a path to become a special experience for all. The value and importance of early childhood education and care is often more recognized than the professionals that deliver that education and care. One educator shared, "This conference celebrated the educators. Not the work that we do. Which is so appreciated." Another said, "It was not about pedagogies but how important we are to each other and the foundation of early learning in Ontario".

When educators are well supported and deeply cared for, the work they are able to do with children and families intensifies and deepens. Professional learning that specifically focuses on recognizing the immense value that ECEs bring to our communities brings hope and joy to those same educators. It is also incredibly impactful for ECEs to see each other in leadership

capacities. In this space, educators were valued as knowledgeable professionals. The fact that all of the presenters sharing their knowledge and experiences were ECEs working front-line with children, families and ECE students was meaningful and led to others considering their leadership capacities in a different way. Participants shared that, "on the floor educators being highlighted and SEEN was important to me" and that they "liked how this conference spoke to the experiences and knowledge of early childhood educators. I liked how this conference centered the voices and lived experiences of early childhood educators." Participants did not want this type of professional learning to end, telling us, "Please keep highlighting on the floor educators! I love hearing from them. Keep the passion <3".

Impact on Engagement

Meaningful, self-chosen, and interesting professional learning opportunities are key to engagement. Participating in professional learning with this type of focus was absolutely meaningful as educators felt a renewed sense of connection to their work. "It reminded me of why I became an ECE", and "I was able to find my why again" were common themes throughout the survey. There were also multiple sessions to choose from and various ways to connect with others throughout the conference. Educators found that "the variety of the workshops offer[ed] so much choice." Friday evening's virtual conversation lounges provided multiple spaces for educators to choose from, with options including things like sharing songs, speed networking, discussing unionization, sharing memes and jokes, learning about the AECEO, and more. It was recognized that "there is a different level of synergy among ECE professionals that value their contributions to the advancement of the profession and this positive energy radiates through all." The sessions offered were interesting and "touched today's topics that need to be addressed in order to get the conversation moving so we can do our part in creating awareness." ECEs also appreciated the opportunity to engage with each other. While working in program educators do not often have the opportunity to connect with each other outside of classroom-related discussions. One participant shared that, "the positive energy of the people that I was able to connect with during the conference and the facilitators inspired my hope and curiosity in the ECE profession".

Impact on Belonging

This positive energy radiated throughout the group of educators who spent time together at the conference creating a deep sense of belonging and connectedness. Having professional relationships with other educators connects us to the field and our work, and when we share our experiences and our knowledge we connect with other educators. With Early Childhood Educators leading the sessions, each session became an opportunity to share experiences, to see ourselves in others' stories. One participant "found joy and hope in just the connections, vulnerability, sharing of stories and experiences" and later stated that, "it made me feel like I am not alone". Another shared that their participation in the conference "gave me space to reflect on my practices, and to see that I am knowledgeable and that there are many individuals that feel like me. I am not alone." This theme of not feeling alone, of feeling a "renewed sense of connection and community", and of belonging, is one of the keys to retention in the sector. It is evident when participants of a learning community leave a space feeling "hope that others can relate to my journey, curiosity to find professional friends, hope that I can mentor others who are starting out in this profession, and joy to be included in such a safe space to share", that the creators of this space have recognized the importance of belonging to educators well-being.

Impact on Well-Being

Educator well-being is also supported by a strong sense of community. One educator shared that they "felt supported, empowered and welcome" at the conference. This is how all professional learning should feel. Conferences that leave educators feeling "inspired to be the best educator [they] can be, to be mindful of life and enjoy it with children" lead to healthier, happier, stronger educators. When educators have a strong sense of well-being, they are more equipped to provide the intense care integral in their roles with young children. Educators recognized this, and shared that the AECEO conference "sparked new ideas and made me feel hopeful about our profession because we were able to raise each other up and support the amazing work that we do everyday with children and their families." Raising each other up was the entire theme of the conference, which felt necessary as our sector works though the ramifications of the covid-19 pandemic and the new Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan. An educator shared that "it was so great feeling connected to everyone. The last few years have been so isolating" while another mentioned the "conference gave me so much hope for the ECE community". ECEs need spaces that inspire professional curiosity, joy, and hope, center community, and focus on the well-being of the educator and recognize their important role as the

foundation of the early learning system. An educator shared that "despite the challenges within the sector I felt inspired and comforted knowing that there is a wonderful support network for ECEs."

Impact on Expression

Spaces for ECEs are also needed where educators can raise their voice, where expression can be fostered in all forms and educators themselves can direct the discussion on the policies that are created to meet their needs. Educators left the conference with a new confidence in their voice, and a recognition of the power in using our voices for collective change. A participant shared that the conference, "gave me the confidence to advocate for myself and for our field! I have learned so much, and was able to be inspired and hear from so many inspiring speakers and community members." Without stringent academic requirements for presentations, presenters were able to express their interests on the topics that were meaningful to them. They were able to share their journeys and their learnings, where they met challenges and barriers and what they did to overcome these. This opportunity led to one presenter sharing that the conference "definitely inspired [them] to develop new leadership strategies and reflect more upon my own leadership abilities within the field. This conference brings me hope for our sector!"

Impact on Leadership

Leadership and growth were topics that came up from every group involved in the conference, particularly from the presenters. With just over 50% of the presenters having never presented at a conference before, this opportunity provided educators a space to gain experience in an area of their professional identities that may never have been previously explored. Doing something new takes bravery and vulnerability, and with experience confidence has the ability to grow. Presenters shared that their experience with the conference, "was very helpful and increased my confidence. The team inspired me all the time" and that "It gave me an opportunity to come out of my comfort zone in a positive environment". Another shared that the conference gave them, "more confidence in speaking about what interests me [and] more confiden[ce] describing myself as a leader in my selection field/interests presented". Alongside confidence, presenters shared that, "presenting helped to further develop courage, self awareness, teamwork and strategic thinking" and that "It has encouraged me to keep on presenting and to seek out more opportunities to do so." These are educators in the world who are now seeking further opportunities to do an incredible thing that they had not done before.

Impact of Raising Each Other Up

The responses shared by participants and presenters at the conference demonstrate how meaningful and impactful that being a part of an event that focuses on educators is for those involved. The foundations of how learning happens were embedded into the experiences that were provided and the comments above show the response that educators across Ontario had to that. With additional remarks such as, "It gave me hope about creating a closer community in the workspace" and "It shows that we are all in this together, that we are not only impacting ourselves but others around us" we can see that focusing on relationships, community building, knowledge sharing, and raising each other up creates deep bonds between educators and a deeper connection to the work and the field. The conference "was a good reminder how meaningful and impactful our work is for not only the children in our programs, but how meaningful our relationships with our fellow educators are". This work has also been noticed by others who provide professional learning to educators; groups have asked to review the AECEO Proposal Submission Guidelines and one municipality even reached out requesting more information to support their educators in participation. The AECEO is grateful to have had the opportunity to provide this experience, to create an event alongside ECEs that was focused on ECEs. The work that you all do is so important. We see you, we recognize you, and we appreciate the opportunity to learn in community with you.

Was The Risk Worth Taking?

By Tracy Rees

Background Information

Tender Loving Daycare is a licensed childcare centre that has been serving children and their families in the Cambridge community since 1999. We have a licensed capacity for forty-five children with a variety of personalities, special needs and skills. This same statement can be made about the fourteen team members that we have supporting our organization. Each of them is dedicated to this profession, their children and the concept of transformational change. We will share with you our short biographies, so hopefully, you can see yourselves in our story. Our goal was to inspire the early years profession with our stories and show that taking the risk of caring and supporting each other, we will raise each other up!

Tracy Rees has been an owner/operator of a licensed childcare centre for 23 years. Her most important role is mother and grandmother, but is an educator through and through! She has just graduated with her Master of Education and believes that it takes a strong community to support one another in today's world.

Shannon Heidenreich began a placement with Tender Loving Daycare in 2017, "unaware of the impact that meeting would have on my life and my family". She is currently enrolled in Conestoga College's Apprenticeship program and working towards her RECE qualifications. The flexibility from TLD management and coworkers has helped to keep her goals on the right path.

Victoria Machado graduated from Conestoga College's Apprenticeship program in 2021. She has been a full-time team member of TLD in our Discovery Zone preschool room. She currently enjoys mentoring and coaching the many placement students she has hosted.

Bimpe Sarah Okeowo is a 32-year-old female from Nigeria, who moved here when she was young. She currently lives in Paris, Ontario. She always knew that she wanted to be an educator and that is what she followed through on even with her severe health condition that affected her life and her job many times. She has been an RECE for 12 years. She currently works at TLD where she has been for the past 5 years and states, "it has been the best experience of my life!"

Katie Arsenault graduated from Mohawk College in 2013. She has been a RECE and full-time toddler teacher at TLD since 2014. She is currently enrolled in the Resource Consultant Course at Conestoga College. She has taken her skills to a new level of mentoring and supporting new RECEs in the field.

Our Reflection on the Idea of Experts

The following was the opening to our presentation during the 2023 AECEO Provincial Conference, The Risk Worth Taking:

We are going to share with you the many risks that we have taken, personally and professionally. Looking through the lens of our lived experiences combined with leadership theories, we hope to inspire you in any position you may hold in this profession to take a risk. The risk is to use your own lived experiences to guide your leadership style, and to look at how past leaders may be influencing you positively or negatively. We hope to inspire a culture shift towards change - to support and care for each other. (Rees, et al., 2023)

As a team, we were asked to reflect on the experience of being positioned as an "expert". Quite frankly, it hadn't crossed our minds. As a team of professionals, that between us have over sixty years of experience, we have never viewed ourselves as experts. Professionals, yes, experts, no! If the AECEO had advertised for experts, we would not have answered their call for speakers. They wanted early years professionals who haven't traditionally seen themselves as conference presenters (AECEO, 2023). We viewed ourselves as a team; a team with stories to share and a message to voice.

Let's examine the definition of expert, "a person with extensive knowledge or ability based on research, experience or occupation and in a particular area of study" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Experts are often called in for advice on their respective subjects. The qualities of an expert are knowledge, experience, adaptability, and judgment. As a team, we reflected on this definition and the listed qualities and concluded that we did meet the criteria of experts.

We were called in for advice on our respective subjects. To be fair, we chose the subject matter, but the AECEO did call for early years professionals who had a message to share. We considered that we had extensive knowledge of transformational leadership and growth mindset. Through the years, we have lived it, day after day in our work environment. We challenged each other, and supported each team member to become the best that they could be! As a group of professionals, we had not based our knowledge on traditional research methods but had seen the effects of a work environment that allowed each person to bring their lived experience to their vocation.

Our Staffroom: Where the Magic Happens!

Although we recognized that we had a shared value system when it came to our work ethics, going through the conference presentation process brought to light the diversity of our group. Through the numerous hours of coming together, writing, editing, practising and then starting the process over again, we were able to share stories of cultural differences, diverse development, and mental health struggles. It included the voices of all positions within a childcare environment; RECEs, apprenticeship students, and supervisors. Generating this presentation, we realized how adaptable we are to each other's needs.

Pre-Conference Thoughts

This adaptability was conveyed during this challenge we were about to embark on together. When I approached each of my peers to support my dream of presenting; their reactions were varied. The first thoughts that came were anxiety and nervousness. This was broken through once they understood the importance of the message we were trying to share. Shannon stated, "why would you want me to speak when other staff members are more confident speaking in front of others?" I explained that they (i.e. the AECEO) were not asking for experts. They were asking for people who had a story and message to share, they want to center the voice of educators, which is your voice.

As we started the work, we heard each other's messages and noticed that we shared much in common, but also had our differences. We had created a community that understood each other, and we wanted to bring the knowledge that a growth mindset and transformational environment is achievable in childcare. In our roles of caring for others, we need to find the time to care, nurture, and challenge each other. As we toiled, we were concerned about the flow; would people be interested? Was it cohesive? Was it diverse? Were we getting our message across? Through the composition, we formatted and reformatted. One of our members re-wrote her part the evening before! The night before we spoke about making a connection with the audience not to read from our notes, but looking across the table as if we were having these talks in the staffroom like we had so many times before. We shared the nervousness, just before we began. This ranged for us from a few butterflies to an all-out panic attack, moments before we went "on."

Post-Conference Thoughts

Right after this presentation, I can tell you – we were on a high! We celebrated our courage and judgment in taking on this challenge together, by sharing a meal. Our immediate reaction, after the presentation, was accomplishment, as we had left that presentation feeling confident and capable. We had worked diligently to make our presentation cohesive, meaningful, and relatable. We had made ourselves vulnerable; something that as a team, we have been able to do for years. Deciding to make ourselves vulnerable with our professional peers was a judgment that we decided was worth the risk for the message we sought to share. As Bimpe stated, "I felt good to share my story, so that it helps someone else in the future." With the feedback we were receiving throughout the presentation, we knew we had hit the mark! Victoria stated, "I felt like every feeling and emotion I had was worth it. I felt like we had done something great!" We laughed at our nervousness beforehand and during, but all acknowledged that we would engage in this experience again. Katie stated, "I didn't believe I had much to offer. I found and rediscovered my why." We reflected on our growth as professionals. Even though we are all at a variety of levels of education and years of experience, we could share in the commonality of growth with this experience.

In retrospect, we have the qualities and meet the definition of experts. As our presentation tried to exemplify, we use a growth mindset in our environment. If we were to sit back and proclaim ourselves as experts would our learning be complete? As Jeff Goins (2017) wrote, "we prefer to practice in public in a way that is both honest and humble and helps others as we go." We prefer to consider ourselves as a team that has created a model of care that works for our children and families, but more importantly ourselves. In the AECEO's post conference article they shared that conference attendees learnt, "how important we [i.e. ECEs] are to each other" and the importance of prioritizing our growth (Straker & Najeemudeen, 2023, p.35). Bimpe was right, sharing our story did help someone and it didn't take long to do that.

Acknowledgement

A special thanks to my co-presenters Bimpe Sarah Okeowo, Katie Arsenault, Shannon Heidenreich and Victoria Machado and all the educators at TLD for taking on this challenge with me. Thank you Safra Najeemudeen and the AECEO team for your encouraging words, support and most importantly, your invitation to take on this challenge.

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What Happened After the 2023 AECEO Provincial Conference

By Danielle Wittick

I, Danielle, want to share what I came to learn and understand while working alongside two RECEs, two supervisors, and another director when we stopped to consider ways to grow and strengthen our community.

Everyone who attended the AECEO conference came to understand why the NYAD team presented. I do not want to speak to that; I want to highlight how the conference gave the early years sector a platform to try something new - a way to re-discover our educator identities and communities. When the idea was presented to the educators to apply to be presenters at the 2023 AECEO Provincial Conference, we had no idea that the journey we would take together would be a strong reminder that it starts with the educators and ends with the educators.

After the conference presentation adrenaline had passed, I was inspired to sit with the NYAD educators and hear their experiences.

Background Information

Danielle Wittick: I have worked in the childcare field for most of my career. I have to give some credit to the sector for helping me become the person I am today. Where else do you get the opportunity to work with so many different individual people, from many different communities, all coming together in one place for children to grow.

Lisa D'Andrea: I am a supervisor at NYAD Midland. My perspective was just being part of this collaboration and seeing where it goes.

Mary Gabriele-Skelly: I [have been] an early childhood educator for many, many years, and my perspective was to bring my experiences and my knowledge, and the knowledge and experiences of the people that work with me in NYAD to the forefront.

Sandra Holver-Calhoun: I am a supervisor at the Corvette location. My role was to bring a perspective on special needs.

Victoria Aird: I am a toddler teacher at our Donwood location. My role in it was having a perspective from an educator on the floor.

Our Conversations

ECEs have a difficult time putting themselves first

Research tells us that children are affected by how their educators view themselves, and highlights the importance of all early years staff engaging in joint learning and critical reflection (Khattar & Callaghan, 2015). During the collaborative reflections to prepare for the conference, we, as a group, came to realize that ECEs have a difficult time putting themselves first.

Mary: I was thinking that we [would discover] that there may be so many possibilities to 'raise each other up,' but we get stuck in our daily routine that we don't see them. It's when we truly engage with each other that we can see the possibilities, the potentials, and we give ourselves the opportunity to really see the other person/s in a different light.

During the preparation for the conference, an educator decided they could not fully commit to their role as an ECE if they continued with the conference.

Mary: I wonder where these educators get the message that they matter less than the children?

Victoria: The term "profession," I don't think of anything different.

Together as a group, we wondered how we address the real-life challenges educators face as they juggle the responsibility of supporting the children's growth and their own growth - "growing children deserve growing adults" (Straker & Najeemudeen, 2023, para. 2).

ECEs raise each other up

The conference committee, when they heard that an original participant was not continuing, they took from the conference theme description, 'how we reaffirm and reclaim our roles as educators, learn from each other, and center the voices of educators through knowledge sharing and learning.'

Mary: Over the past few years, I've been thinking about what our educators bring and the knowledge base that they have and all the experience that they have. How much power they could have if they take that opportunity and look at the possibilities each and every day.

Supporting each other, building relationships, which allows us to take risks.

Victoria: Well, for me, it was how it was pitched to me. Mary said about how we could utilize the talent within; it was kind of a compliment. So I was like, okay, I guess I shouldn't just say no, and I was excited to challenge myself. I've always mentioned to Danielle in the past that I don't want to get bored or stagnant. You, [Danielle], heard me and came to me with this opportunity. The challenges for myself personally were trying to manage time off the floor to meet for the meetings and not feel like I was taking advantage of my other team members or putting my supervisor in a spot where she would have to find coverage for me. So I always worry about that when I take on things outside of the classroom. But those challenges were met by, obviously, my supervisor supporting me and covering me without question. Also, the support from the group with the meetings. We did meetings during the day sometimes, we met in the morning, evenings, working around everyone's schedule. So that's really my biggest challenge was that, and then that's how we overcame it.

Mary: It started off with the NYAD sensory night, but I wonder if there was more comfort as we went into the possibility of presenting at the AECEO, because we had built a relationship that was pretty solid. And we were thinking, okay, I've got the supports. I've got my people here. Yeah, that they're gonna help me through this. And we can do this. We can do that.

Sandra: Yes, a pushing force, and I agree with Mary, if I didn't have the support I know I couldn't have done the conference. I would have been a basket case. We built a relationship, and the support was there from all of us, it was just all supportive, and our ideas and what, as you said, you know, what's your time like? How can we work around your schedule, and I think that was really valuable to how we got through it all.

Lisa: That was the comfort in knowing that okay, we're meeting next week. All right, we've got to know what we're bringing to the table next week. What we're going to do the following week, and having that step by step and breaking it down to our meetings. Yeah, it was really helpful.

Mary: One is getting comfortable with that "unknown". And I think that's what happened at the workshop. We got comfortable with the unknown enough that when you suggested the conference that we thought why not, we can do this because, you know, the guidelines are pretty much there. We can do it.

Sandra: Well, the interesting thing is I thought it would be more of a hierarchy kind of thing. And it wasn't at all. And really a lot of the ideas came from Victoria and Anne. Which was really cool because that's where it should have come from, the educators on the floor. So that was my initial thought, and it was very refreshing that it wasn't like that at all. We're all equals at that table.

Lisa: We knew who was guiding this ship, but we all felt like we were also guiding it as well, and that was a great piece because the hierarchy was not felt.

Mary: I'm thinking why can't we use multiple multidisciplinary teams or why can't we use a different phrase, you know, then different levels because we came together in my opinion as people with different experiences that we're going to put on a NYAD night, bringing our own perspectives, our own experiences, our own histories, our own learnings that we probably got from each other at the table at that point and are going to present.

Victoria: I went into it assuming and secretly hoping that there was going to be a hierarchy and I was going to be at the bottom and I was going to be like a silent contributor or you're using our stuff for our space. Then when I got there I was told, you need to tell us exactly what to do. So as hard as I tried to be at the bottom, it never happened.

Mary: I think that's one of the biggest discourses in our field, right? Not only in our field, I probably think in life in general, like I mean, everybody has such an important role to play within our lives and their lives. And yet when you put them in a little box, it really diminishes and devalues us and it basically stops people right then and there. I just think that we all have different thoughts, and no matter who it is, that there's something of value that we can learn from them and as long as we're open to hearing it.

Victoria: And I think initially, when my room partner didn't want to carry on with it, I was a little, well, can I go on without her? Or if I go on without her, will she resent me? Or something like that, right. But I went on, and she encouraged me from the sidelines. And even coming here today about it, I told her, she was like, oh, good, she's excited. Although we had differing opinions about how far we wanted to go in the process, she still supported me in continuing on. And even after the meetings, never once was she like another meeting. She was like, oh, yeah, still going on.

Sandra: Did I think being a part of this process would take away from my daily routine? No, definitely more interesting because it changes your day. Thinking about different things, your mindset is different. And it's just different from the daily routines of what you do, right? Even though every day in childcare is a little bit different, it never goes exactly how you plan it to go. And it was really just a nice opportunity to take you away from that, I guess.

Lisa: Yeah, that's what I would agree with 100%. It was a nice opportunity to take you away to be with another group other than the group that you're there 8 hours a day with every day-in, day-out, listening to what their offerings are. You have a chance now to offer yourself or be part of another.

Mary: Victoria, would you say that your coworkers weren't as worried about themselves as you were, again, because we're in that role of always caring about the other? Now that you've gone through this experience, do you feel better about the people that you're working with?

Victoria: We had to lean on others, and even having the supervisor in the room for an hour to help cover, yeah, it was kind of changing your perspective, like, this is important, too, and whatever will be will be there. To have faith in others and to know that even at that time, where me and my room partner went our separate ways, to know that never have I felt that she can't handle it on her own. Never. But it's more a matter of, like, am I exhausting her if I go to this? And again, she really never made me feel that way. So it was an important lesson.

Reaffirm and reclaim our roles as educators

During the interview I asked the group to consider the term 'critical friendships' that was introduced in an article. Costa and Kallick (1993 as cited in Khattar & Callaghan, 2015) writes:

> A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (p. 50)

As I read from the paper, I asked if they felt a relation like this evolving during our time together.

Victoria: So for me, that was Mary's input. You always opened my mind, it's like, this is too simple, why don't we think about this? Or are we being too narrow? And sometimes I think maybe because I am on the floor, I have to get from A to B, and Mary was like, no, let's explore. And sometimes we did end up on the same path, but it kind of got us chatting.

Sandra: I think the dialogue that we had definitely opened up the perspective. So we got to see a lot of different perspectives.

Mary: There were points, and I really appreciate you, Victoria saying that, because I thought I bit my tongue an awful lot. Maybe I didn't do as much as I thought I should. I wrote on the sidelines, we were just playing nice. And that's the question that I'm sitting with. Were we just playing nice? We had this goal, and we wanted to get there. So were we just playing nice?

Sandra: I do remember some moments, strong moments. So I don't think it was just being nice. I think when you read that a critical friend, it's a two way street. I mean I can give some good positive criticism, and good feedback, but if you're not willing to accept it, it's going nowhere. I think we all were open to all of the criticism, to ideas and sharing that and being okay. Maybe my idea wasn't a good one, and that's okay, or was too simple, or that's a great idea, but maybe we'll tweak it. I think that was a lot of the dialogue. I don't think we were playing nice, but I think we're all very receptive.

Lisa: But there was the trust. There was the trusting and the respectful piece.

Mary: And that's why I kind of go back to that question, because we were all being very receptive, were we just playing nice? And again, I'm not trying to be difficult. I'm really not. But it was one of my first thoughts when I read that. I said, were we just playing nice?

Lisa: There might have been moments, like, depending on you coming from your center, you just dealt with something happening, or something happened in your classroom or vice versa. Maybe when you get there, you're not ready for all the critical thinking. You just need that. So you put yourself in this

mood and maybe I'll just get it done. Play nice, get it done. Right because there's so many other things that we're thinking about to deal with. I don't think we were playing maybe moments of playing. I think we were honest.

Sandra: Evolved.

As I listened to the group, I wondered how this passion, critical friendships, critical thinking, and relations continue and not become a simple memory. Something that can stay lit within themselves, and possibly become a light for someone else.

The AECEO Provincial Conference was envisioned to be a space that focused on educator wellbeing (and not our practice), and a space for ECEs to grow and strengthen our community (Straker & Najeemudeen, 2023). Building on this, the final question was, how did you grow as an educator being part of the AECEO conference?

Victoria: So for me, something that I always struggle with is I'm proud that I'm an ECE, but sometimes I feel like people that don't know the profession, they have an assumption of what it is that you do, and that's a huge struggle that I have, is advocating what I do. So I think of telling my partner's mom about the conference, that was something she could really understand, and I think that was something that surprised her that I would be doing in my profession. Not that she's putting me down or anything, but she just has a vision. And then so when I told her about the conference, she was like, a conference, like, to her, is that what it was even called, the conference? It was you who was part of a conference. But she related to that and she understood that, and I think in a small way, it changed her lens of what I do.

Lisa: Well, I think that when the statement is that you start with the educator and you end with the educator, it's like taking yourself out of that role of supervisor and putting the shoes on as an educator and fitting into those shoes along with that person that you are working with. We're educators first and foremost, regardless of our role or hierarchy. That's what we do. And so it's relatable to anyone that walks through that door.

Sandra: I do think it's important for NYAD to continue to support these types of nights, workshops, or participating in a conference. I do think it's important for an organization to continue because that's professional development for everybody who works in this organization, whether it's put on by the program directors or the staff. Regardless, it's an opportunity for people to learn and grow in this field.

Conclusion

What I continue to return to is the term that was questioned at the beginning of the interview 'professionalism'. Randa Khattar and Callaghan (2015) asks us to consider Moss' (2010) words "beyond professionalism". He invites us to question what is meant by the term "professionalism", how we might challenge it, re-conceptualize it and reclaim it. Has the 2023 AECEO Provincial Conference silently given us a platform to do that? Was NYAD's support and determination also a platform to challenge this idea? The conference committee wanted to give ECEs a space to see themselves as presenters and experts of their own contexts (Straker & Najeemudeen, 2023). The educators I sat with, came with a perspective that they wanted to share. In the end, I believe, the educators unknowingly shared much more.

Gratitude

Again I can only speak for myself when I say, I feel the conference gave an opportunity for ECEs - a safe place to try something new. Even after the conference, the support it has continued to give. It has given me something greater than supporting NYAD educators at a conference, it has given me the ability to write this paper.

A special thanks to my co-presenters Mary Gabriele-Skelley, Sandra Holver-Calhoun, Lisa D'Andrade, Victoria Aird, Anne Reid and all the educators at NYAD Community Inc for joining me on this journey. Thank you Safra Najeemudeen, Amber Straker and the AECEO team for your continued support you have given to me to continue on this journey!

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Creating shared meanings: Reflecting on our AECEO conference presentation

Authors:
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We (Shehla Masroor, Meena Ahuja and Nidhi Menon) are three ECEs coming together to reflect on our experiences about presenting at the AECEO conference in April 2023. Our presentation was called, "Centering Marginalized Voices: Sharing lived experiences as professionals working with newcomer families". Shehla and Meena are co-workers in a Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) center serving newcomer families. Nidhi is an ECE and researcher working in a post-secondary Early Childhood Studies program. Shehla, Meena and Nidhi are also members of a Community of Practice sponsored by the AECEO. We have known each other for over 10 years. What began as occasional meetings to discuss the progress of placement students in the CNC center, progressed into long reflections and discussions about our journeys as immigrants, our role as mothers raising daughters and racialized ECEs striving to find our voice and sense of purpose. In this reflection, we engage in a conversation about sharing our lived experiences as ECEs to a large audience through a presentation. Through this reflective exercise, we pause and engage in a conversation about our challenges and triumphs that emerged from a creative endeavor. We make visible our shared meanings, pause alongside the moments that challenged us, reveal what we grappled with and finally revel in moments that allowed us to step into our power. First, we present our reflections on the challenges experienced in creating the presentation.

Shehla: This was my very first presentation. It was intimidating and I experienced some challenges when creating my presentation. One of them was choosing what to include. It was challenging to decide which personal experiences and aspects of my journey to include in the presentation, because I had many relevant stories and details. Secondly, it was challenging to balance personal and professional experiences. Sharing personal experiences in front of an audience was tough for me, especially choosing and using appropriate visuals, such as photos or slides, to support my lived experiences. Finding time to rehearse my presentation was a challenge, because practice was essential to delivering a smooth and polished presentation, so this was necessary.

Meena: The challenging part of this presentation was articulating my story through a presentation. As my lived experience is a part of who I am and my thought process, documenting it and sharing it with others was a new experience for me. I found that the only way to overcome this challenge was to just start writing my thoughts down. Once I wrote everything about my lived experience, I was able to edit my story to include relevant details and exclude information that was unnecessary to make it flow and comprehensible. In the beginning, I was a little hesitant since it was my first experience presenting at a conference, but I realized that the more I familiarized myself with my material, the more confident I would be in sharing my knowledge and experience. As we (Shehla, Nidhi and I) worked together to create and design this presentation, I recognized the uniqueness of my lived experience and knew it had to be shared on a platform with professionals who would appreciate my story.

Nidhi: When we received feedback on our proposal, we were asked to shift our lived experiences to the forefront rather than highlight our practices in order to align with the theme of the conference. This shift ushered in a process fraught with challenges. First, there was great doubt and uncertainty around professionalism. We debated about whether focusing on our lived experiences and our journeys to be and become ECEs would take away from us as professionals. Even though we acknowledged that our pedagogy and practice is part of our lived experience, we were hesitant to bring our personal selves into the forefront. We questioned if the other attendees would find value in our stories. We wondered if our journeys, feelings, emotions, failures, growth, and relations would offer value to the attendees. We also received a lot of negative feedback from fellow ECEs about these questions which almost derailed our decision to participate in this conference. We had to pause and step back at many moments to (re)orient ourselves and decide if we wanted to move forward. What moments should we highlight, how much of ourselves should we share? We wondered if we would be judged, implicated, stereotyped. We questioned if we wanted to take the time and space to be vulnerable and share our lives and journeys. We were weighed down by the dominant discourse that to be a professional we must focus on our pedagogy and practice, stick to our lane and only highlight the technical aspects of being an ECE.

Next, we reflected on the triumphs we experienced individually and collectively through the process of preparing and presenting at this conference.

Shehla: As I reflect on the positive experiences of my first ever conference presentation, I am enveloped in the sense of pride in sharing my knowledge and experiences in the field. I am proud of how I effectively conveyed my message and maintained the audience's interest. Working on this presentation with both of you improved my presentation skills. I learned how to structure, deliver, and engage an audience more effectively. As my presentation was delivered well and I saw the audience's engagement, my confidence grew. I felt a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment when the presentation went well, and the message was well-received. My participation in this presentation happened because of Nidhi's encouragement and support so a big thanks to her. This experience is one I will always remember which helped me realize that my personal experiences and journey can be a powerful and relatable story when shared effectively.

Meena: Though I am a sociable person, I did not have experience presenting at a conference amongst ECEs. I was happy to share my knowledge of ECE and highlight the work of my organization and how we support newcomers to Canada. I was proud to share what we do on such a big platform provided by the AECEO and know that we engaged a large audience because our session was well attended. I learned that my lived experience was not a linear path to becoming an ECE. Sharing my story on such a platform was exhilarating, especially with an engaging and appreciative audience. I felt comfortable speaking with the audience as they were quite interested to hear what I had to say and were accepting and appreciative throughout the presentation. I would like to thank Nidhi for her support, guidance, and positivity throughout this whole process. It is certainly one I will never forget!

Nidhi: As a researcher and scholar of social justice in the field of early childhood, I have presented at various conferences. Even though I have gained confidence and skills during each, the presentation with Meena and Shehla was special because of the process we went through together. We met every week for almost six weeks, working slowly and closely, through our challenges and this process was rich, reflective, and relational. We grew together, supported each other and this resulted in a successful and well attended presentation which was also well received by the AECEO and the ECE attendees. Even though we experienced discomfort throughout the planning and presentation process, we felt seen, and our voices heard. Highlighting our multiple social locations and intersectional identities, we placed ourselves as women, people of colour, mothers, partners, immigrants and ECEs. Most importantly, as a CoP lead, mentor and fellow ECE, I am proud of Shehla and Meena's courage, enthusiasm, and willingness to live with discomfort, push boundaries and step into this opportunity with kindness, grace and generosity.

Reflection, a valuable and essential process of growth and learning is a process we engage in as ECEs in our everyday practice with children and families. In this reflective article, we collectively documented our journey of being and becoming. Documentation is often conceptualized as something ECEs do for and with children and families, but it is also a powerful process of self-growth and learning. This article makes space for us ECEs to make visible our learning outside of the early childhood setting. When we were asked to consider our lived experiences beyond our practice with young children and families, it shifted our thinking. It made us confront our fears and pushed us into a space of discomfort. It also allowed us to debate and reflect on the dominant discourses about being a professional and professionalism. We pushed back against a singular definition of ECEs as technicians and highlighted our journeys as ECEs. Our reflection brought us the realization that this kind of discomfort is essential to feature our intersectional identities and social locations. We identify as women, immigrants, people of colour and ECEs. In other words, we are more than 'just ECEs' which is a message often touted by the AECEO. This message highlights us as worthy individuals who must be heard, valued, and respected for who we are and what we bring to the multiple spaces we occupy. It makes space for our knowledge to be at the forefront, to shift it from the margins to the center. Ultimately, it values and highlights our collective humanity, the need to engage in the process of shared meaning-making, and to make space for vulnerability as ECEs.

An ECE Instructor's Action Research: Reflections on an Initiative to Teach Anishinaabemowin

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Abstract

An instructor of an Indigenous early childhood education certification program who collaborated with two university researchers introduced Anishinaabemowin language teaching activities within an otherwise Western English-dominant program. In this paper, we introduce a collaborative action research study and show the value of action research to early childhood educators' professional learning as well as provide suggested teaching strategies for teaching Indigenous languages, with examples from Anishinaabemowin that were part of our action research project. Through reading about the story of our collaborative action research, we hope that ECEs will consider taking up action research in their own practice.

Keywords: collaborative action research, preservice early childhood educators, Anishinaabemowin language teaching, Indigenous education

Introduction

Our collaborative action research involves an instructor of an Indigenous early childhood education certification program, Eugema, who collaborated with two university researchers to introduce Anishinaabemowin language teaching activities within an otherwise Western English-dominant program. We have two purposes for writing this paper: (1) to introduce our collaborative action research study and show the value of action research to early childhood educators' professional learning and (2) to provide suggested teaching strategies for teaching Indigenous languages, with examples from Anishinaabemowin that were part of our action research project.

Our action research starts with the premise that Indigenous language revitalization is important and worthwhile, not only to the speakers of the language, but also to early childhood educators and children across Canada because we all can learn from the ways of knowing and being encoded in the languages (Hornberger, 2011). Additionally, our work recognizes the contributions of action research to the learning of children and the early childhood educators and teachers who work with them (Hendricks, 2016; Peterson et al., 2018b). Our action research was guided by these research questions:

1. How does an instructor of pre-service early childhood educators, who is learning Anishinaabemowin herself, teach the language in her class?

2. In conversations while reflecting on video recordings of her teaching, what principles does she identify that have guided her Anishinaabemowin language teaching?

In a spirit of generating greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we propose that it is important for Ontario early childhood educators to consider learning some Anishinaabemowin words. In Ontario, as of 2021, 10.7% of First Nations people reported speaking an Indigenous language (Statistics Canada, 2023), with Anishinaabemowin being the language of 14,535 speakers. This number represents a decrease of 6.5% from 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2023). The number of First Nations people who reported speaking an Indigenous language as a *second language*, however, is increasing, up by 18.9% from 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2023). This increase in second language learners of Indigenous languages is promising. However, greater opportunities to take up Indigenous languages and cultures are needed if there is to be an increase in overall Indigenous language speakers year over year. This responsibility cannot fall on the shoulders of First Nations people alone. As McIvor (2020) argues, "partners and allies need to do more to ensure this outcome" (p. 79).

With the dual focus of our paper, the literature review that follows presents a short summary of research on Indigenous language teaching in early childhood settings and a review of literature on early childhood educators carrying out collaborative action research.

Literature Review

Teaching Indigenous Languages in Early Learning Contexts

Researchers tell us that Indigenous language initiatives in early learning centres and classrooms should provide children with ongoing exposure and

meaningful opportunities to use the language(s) in real-life contexts within and outside the classroom (McIvor, 2020; Rorick, 2019; Tidal, 2018). This means that early childhood educators would use the Indigenous language throughout the day for routine interactions, such as gathering at the calendar to talk about the day and the weather, in transition times when giving instructions, and in various play contexts that are part of everyday activities.

Especially important is early childhood educators' use of Indigenous words and phrases while engaging children in traditional cultural practices. ECEs in an Aboriginal Head Start program in northern Ontario (Peterson et al., 2018a) carried out an action research project where they used Anishinaabemowin when children interacted with objects from their Anishinaabeg culture, and in land-based activities. Children aged 2-5 years old demonstrated understanding through picking up or pointing to objects that the ECE named, but they did not use the language in their interactions with peers or the ECE. The ECE action researchers concluded that they needed to continue to use the language in many different contexts to develop children's confidence in speaking the Anishinaabemowin words that they understood.

Initiatives to develop the language fluency of adults in children's lives are very important so that children have models of language use and see the value that adults place on the Indigenous language (Hinton, 2011). The reality of some of Eugema's early childhood education students mirrors that of other adults in previous research (e.g., Rosborough & Rorick, 2017): they and other members of their community of the same generation may know some words in their language, but they are not fluent and do not feel comfortable teaching the language to children. The initiative we describe in this paper is designed to emphasize the value of Anishinaabemowin language and Anishinabeg culture by creating an unofficial space within an ECE certification program (the accreditation for the program is within a non-Indigenous post-secondary institution that has no Indigenous content) for Anishinaabemowin.

Teacher Action Research in Early Childhood Contexts

Early childhood educators can use action research results "to improve practice, improve the learning situation for children, and put children first. They can articulate to others what they are doing and why because they study their own teaching" (Castle, 2021, p. 4). Because the research takes place in the ECEs' own early learning settings, action research is valuable for deepening understandings about teaching approaches that have an impact on the learning of children in *ECEs' own contexts.* ECEs can use the results of action research to address immediate issues and concerns with their students. In a sense, the action research results are tailor-made to their early learning settings.

Data for the action research can be gathered as part of the pedagogical documentation process that is described in the *Kindergarten Curriculum* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). In the process of video recording children interacting with others, and gathering children's drawing/writing, and concrete objects they make out of materials, ECEs identify how children "make thinking and learning visible" (p. 11). At the same time, they are gathering data to address their action research questions about how children learn and about how to support children's learning (Castle, 2021).

Action research is a spiral process. ECE's ask a question that provides a focus for their action research. The question starts with something like, "How will children learn (a particular skill or concept) when I try (whatever the new approach is)?" After gathering and analyzing data, ECEs gain new understandings that will influence their teaching and that lead to new questions (Ellis & Castle, 2010; Hubbard & Power, 2012). ECEs who are action researchers enhance their teaching and children's learning through systematic collection and analysis of data that leads to changes in what happens in their early learning settings (Hopkins, 2014; Pine, 2009).

The action research described in this paper is part of a larger collaborative action research project that spans two Canadian provinces, as well as classrooms in northern Sweden and New Zealand. The goals of the larger project (name withheld for blind review) are to facilitate Indigenous students' learning of their community's language and cultural learning and to support teachers' and ECEs' professional learning within northern Indigenous communities. Our collaborative action research starts with teachers' and ECEs' questions and draws on the expertise, knowledge and resources of the university researchers to support ECEs in their learning through their action research.

Methods

Participants

Eugema is a Registered Early Childhood Educator who has worked over 33 years in various capacities: in childcare with children 0-12 years, as a DECE in the Kindergarten Program, a supervisor in childcare and as a sessional instructor for OCAAT Early Childhood Education Diploma Programs. She has taught core courses in the ECE diploma program for Big Lake Institute for over seven years. Over the past five years, Eugema has been learning Anishinaabemowin and teachings from Anishinaabeg Knowledge Keepers and Elders.

Students who participated in Eugema's action research were in her two classes: Child Development II and Supporting Preschool Children. Although the ECE certification program is delivered in English, as part of the larger collaborative action research project, Eugema had administrative

support to teach Anishinaabemowin. Her action research involved finding teaching approaches that her students found useful to their learning and that they could bring to their early learning centres. Eugema used a curriculum developed by William, a colleague at Big Lake Institute. Eugema's goal was to give her students the opportunity to learn the language and to pass on this knowledge to future generations. As McCarty (2011) suggests, an "obvious hoped-for" outcome of her action research is to produce "a new generation of speakers" (p. 163).

Eugema's courses are completed in a hybrid model. Each semester, for two weeks, courses are taught on campus (although students can choose to stay in their First Nation communities and join the course online). The following four weeks, courses are only taught online. For the next two weeks, courses are taught on campus and then for the final four-week block, courses are taught online. Students come from First Nation communities across Northern Ontario, including remote communities that can only be accessed by air or by winter roads when the lakes freeze over. A few students reside in the northern city in which Big Lake Institute is located.

The participating class had nine female and two male students. Of these students, eight consented to participate in the research. Four of these students were working as early childhood educators in schools and childcare centers. Seven of the eight students reside in Northern Ontario Indigenous communities. Two students speak their Indigenous community's language fluently; each in the local dialect. Five students have some familiarity with their language. The eighth student is non-Indigenous.

Although some students have been working in ECE roles for many years without certification, the provincial government legislated a percentage of certified ECEs in all early learning settings, with numbers contingent upon the adult-child ratio in the classroom. These ECEs are working toward certification at Big Lake Institute – a postsecondary institution that was created by Nishnawbe Aski Nation and established in 2001 as one that "represents the legitimate, socioeconomic, and political aspirations of its First Nation members of Northern Ontario to all levels of government in order to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social and economic independence" (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2020, np).

Shelley and Naz, the other two settler researchers in this collaborative action research project work at a university in Ontario. They served as guides and supporters of Eugema's action research, providing the smart phones for Eugema to gather data through video-recordings, and graduate student assistance in transcribing the focus group. Shelley, a former primary teacher in rural Alberta, is now a professor who teaches and conducts research in literacy teaching and learning. She is the project director of the partnership project (name withheld for blind review) and a learner of Anishinaabemowin. Naz, a registered early childhood educator in Ontario, currently conducts research in literacy teaching and learning on the partnership project as a postdoctoral fellow. As part of this work, she has had opportunities to learn Anishinaabemowin traditional greetings and select few words and phrases largely connected to the project.

William, belongs to Bingui Aniashi Anishinaabeg (Sand Point First Nation). He is an original member from his community. His first language is Ojibwemowin. He did not speak English until he was approximately seven years old. He was raised in that area as a child and lived there until he was an adult at which point, he moved around Ontario. He now resides in Thunder Bay, his adopted city. His role as an Indigenous Language Specialist at Big Lake Institute involves analyzing and reading material as well as making connections to where he is from. William is a life-long learner. He has been studying written Anishinaabemowin for quite some time and has a certificate as an Indigenous Language Specialist from Lakehead University.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered during the beginning of Eugema's face-to-face and online classes when she carried out her action research, trying various approaches to teach Anishinaabemowin to her students. Eugema used a cell phone to video-record her interactions with students who were in the room with her in the face-to-face classes. She used the recording function of Zoom for students participating virtually and for classes taught virtually. She recorded the Anishinaabemowin part of her class in 28 classes. The videos ranged from 12-15 minutes in length.

The two university researchers visited Eugema twice over the period of the research: in early January and in early March. The three of us observed the videos together and Eugema answered these questions to guide her reflections as she viewed the videos with Shelley and Naz:

What was going through your head when you were teaching this class?

1. Are students responding as you had hoped? Please explain.

In the second meeting, this question was added:

2. How has your teaching of Anishinaabemowin changed based on your reflections from January?

These conversations and the video recordings were transcribed by a graduate research assistant. These two transcripts were the main data sources.

Additionally, in the final week of classes, the two university researchers conducted a focus group with two ECEs participating virtually and four in person. Focus group questions included:

1. We are interested in stories of what happened when you participated in Eugema's Anishinaabemowin teaching at Big Lake Institute. Which activities did you find most enjoyable? Which were most useful to help you learn the language? Which were most useful to help you teach the language?

2. How is learning the Anishinaabemowin language and Anishinabeg culture helpful to you as an educator? Why is it important to you to learn the language and culture?

3. Please tell a story of how you applied teaching strategies from the Anishinaabemowin part of Eugema's class in your own early learning setting.

4. What recommendations do you have for Eugema to improve on her Anishinaabemowin teaching in this class?

The focus group conversation was transcribed by a graduate student. We used inductive analysis methods (Patton, 2015) to analyze the conversation and teaching data, as well as the focus group data. Our analysis was guided by the second research question, as we identified principles that guided Eugema's teaching of Anishinaabemowin.

Answering Research Questions and Reflections on How to Improve Anishinaabemowin Teaching

We present our findings in terms of the research questions, beginning with a description of Eugema's Anishinaabemowin teaching approaches and a table of specific teaching strategies and resources that she used. In the appendix, a selection of these strategies is elaborated so that others can try them in their own early learning settings.

We follow this section by elaborating on three principles that came to light in our inductive analysis of Eugema's reflections on the video-recordings of her teaching: (1) teach practical strategies that transfer to early learning settings (2) encourage independence and confidence in using language; (3) invite student input and building on students' existing language.

Eugema's Anishinaabemowin Teaching Approaches

William, Eugema's Indigenous colleague, created a curriculum of Anishinaabemowin words and phrases for Eugema and other instructors to use to teach the language to the ECE students. William is the Indigenous Language Specialist at Big Lake Institute. The process of developing the curriculum took over a year as William worked to develop an Indigenous language curriculum that could be used to infused across the courses at the Institute. He consulted some instructors and did some research on their specific course learning outcomes so that the Indigenous language curriculum would be relevant to their courses. He first created a generic curriculum that could be used across all of the programs (e.g., content about the Seven Grandfather Teachings, greetings, Eagle song, numbers, days of the week, months of the year and time clock as well as protocols for handling sacred items, attending a powwow, harvesting the sacred medicines, colour, four directions, the importance of seeking out an elder – doing due diligence about learning each community's way of life, being and doing). Eugema consulted with William part way through the term to learn about the commands that ECE may use in their childcare centres. William provided a voice recording to that Eugema could learn the pronunciation of the commands.

Although Eugema followed most of William's curriculum, she added a few songs and stories not included in the curriculum, based on her students' interests and on what Eugema had learned in Anishinaabemowin classes she had taken. Eugema wanted to show the students through example some strategies for teaching Anishinaabemowin. She used familiar tunes to teach expressions, such as Boozhoo and Aaniin (hello in English). Eugema has found that singing a song in the Indigenous language with a familiar tune makes it easy for students of any age to learn the Indigenous words. Students can transfer the words to everyday situations where they will understand and use the words because the words have become so familiar through the songs. The repetition is very important, as is the rhythm and joy in singing the melodies, to help students remember the pronunciations and meanings of the words (Todal, 2018).

Eugema also adapted familiar books, introducing Anishinaabemowin words for repeated words and expressions in the book. For example, when reading the story *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See*, (Martin, 1967/1996), Eugema used the Anishinaabemowin words, Ozaawaa Makwa (Brown Bear). The repetition in a meaningful context (she used puppets to accompany the reading), made the words easier to remember, as well.

Eugema tried several teaching approaches over the 28 classes that took place in the 13 weeks of her course. Table 1 provides details of some of the approaches and the language taught through each approach. Please note: we recommend consulting the Ojibwe.net website for pronunciations of the words. This site came out of a gathering where Elders, teachers, translators, and students from Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota came together in 1996 to find a common orthography for the Anishinaabemowin spoken within their communities: https://ojibwe.net/lessons/beginner/the-sound-of-our-language/

Table 1: *List of Activities and Language Taught*

Teaching Approach/Theme	Language Taught
Songs with a familiar western melody:	
Boozhoo, Aaniin to the tune of *Are You Sleeping*	Boozhoo, Aaniin *Hello* Ezhi ayaayan *how are you* 2x nimino-ayaa *I am good/fine* 2x giin dash? *and you?* 2x
Biinichigen to the tune *Clean Up, Clean Up Everybody Everywhere*	Biinichigen, biinichigen, daga biinichigen 2x *Clean up, clean up, please clean up*
Miino-dibishkam to the tune *Happy Birthday to You*	Mino-dibishkam ____. 2x *Happy birthday to* ____ Mino-dibishkam, mino dibishkam *Happy birthday, happy birthday* Mino-dibishkam ____. *Happy birthday to* ___.
Boozhoo Aaniin to the tune *Skip to My Lou*	Boozhoo aaniin *hello, hello* 4x Boozhoo aaniin *hello, hello* ___ nindizhinikaaz *My name is*___.
Songs with a new or unfamiliar melody:	
Spirit Bear Song by Red Shadow Singers	LEAD: Yaa haa we yaa 2x Yaa we awe yaa ALL: Repeat above Yaa we awe Yaa we ha we awe Yaa we awe Yaa we ha we awe ya Manito makwe ga bee baa go zit *The spirit bear is coming* Manito Makwe Peesh awe na mishi nam *The spirit bear is coming to love us*
Ojibwe Counting Song	Bezhig, niizh, niswi, niiwin, naanan 2x *One, two, three, four, five* ningodwaaswi niizhwaaswi nishwaaswi *six, seven, eight* zhaangaswi *nine* mi mi mi midaazwi *ten*

Use of props, question and answer as well as games to learn to say/understand:	
numbers	bezhig *one*, nizh *two*, Niswi *three*, Niiwin *four*, Naanan *five*, Ningodwaaswi *six*, Niizhwaaswi *seven*, Nishwaaswi *eight*, Zhaangaswi *nine*, Midaazwi *ten*, Midaazwi ashi bezhig *eleven*
animals	Makwa *bear*, waawaashkeshi *deer*, migizi *eagle*, mooz *moose*, ma'iingan *wolf*
Reading and games with pictures to learn to say/understand commands	
	Daga na-madabin. *please sit down*, Ambe namadabin *come sit down*, Daga bizindan! *please listen*, Daga bizaanyaayag *all of you quiet please* http://www.wakingupojibwe.ca/resources/families/agindaasodaa-letsread
Reading Books with targeted Anishinaabemowin words:	
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle	Makwa *bear*, makadewaa *black* Makwa *bear* ozawaa *brown*
Engaging in conversations to learn to say/understand traditional greetings/introductions	
	Aan giin ezhinikaazoyin? *What is your name?* ____ nindizhinkaaz. *My name is* ___. Aandi wenjiiyin? *Where are you from?* ___ ndoonjii. *I am from* _____. Awenen giin gi-doodem? *What is your clan?* ___nidoodem. *My clan is* _____. Aandi ezhidaayin? *Where do you live?* ____ nidizhidaa. *I live in* _____. Aaniin endaso-bibooneyan? *How old are you?*

Teaching Practical Strategies that Transfer to Early Learning Settings

Eugema's goal was to model teaching strategies that her ECE students "can bring back to the community to get children involved." She modeled strategies, such as talking to a puppet, singing songs, and playing games with bean bags, that ECEs could implement in their own early learning settings.

She and her students (in their response to focus group questions) observed that the songs were most effective to help ECEs remember the language. Some of the songs were ones she had sung with the children in her Aboriginal Head Start classroom, so she could tell stories of how children had learned to count to three and transfer that learning to many situations.

The most popular song, which students brought back to their own early learning centers in their First Nation communities, is *Boozhoo Boozhoo Aanii* http://www.wakingupojibwe.ca/resources/families/nagamodaa-letssing

Eugema also introduced games with readily-available materials that students could bring to their early learning centres. *BeanBag Number Throw* game was most popular:

> One student calls out a number in Anishinaabemowin and names another student. The second student finds the number on a number mat or on a grid with numbers drawn in chalk on a large piece of paper or sidewalk. and throws a beanbag or other object on the number.

All students say the number in Anishinaabemowin together if the correct number is chosen. The second student calls out a number and chooses another student to throw the beanbag on the correct number.

Figure 1 has descriptions of other games from Eugema's class.

Figure 1: *List of Resources used in Eugema's class*

Additional Anishinaabemowin Resources Eugema Has Used

A. Treuer, A. (2021), Ojibwe Greeting Protocol, accessed 6 May 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbNH39dBrmQ

Neganigwane, B. (2021). *Aaniin Ezhinikaazowin? What is Your Name?* http://www.wakingupojibwe.ca/resources/families/agindaasodaa-letsread/

Kahwa:tsire Indigenous-Led Child & Family Programs 2022, *Ojibwe Counting Song*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_4DG6vREZQ

The Red Shadow Singers (2004). *Spirit Bear* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Kg-hBKje7M

Nandagikendan, W. (2020). Boozhoo, Aaniin! Song! https://soundcloud.com/user-318428576-294512482/boozhoo-aaniin-song

Waking Up Ojibwe Anishinaabemodaa http://www.wakingupojibwe.ca/resources/families/agindaasodaa-letsread

Waking Up Ojibwe 2020, *Mino-dibishkam!-Happy Birthday* https://soundcloud.com/wakingupojibwe/mino-dibishkam-happy-birthday#t=0:00

Encourage Independence and Confidence in Using Language

Eugema said she wanted her students to have the confidence in their language abilities to say, when asked a question, "Oh yeah, I DO know this!" An aha moment for her was that being in a position to teach Anishinaabemowin to others helped her to gain confidence as a language learner, as well. As an Anishinaabemowin learner, herself, Eugema understood firsthand what researchers say about the need to provide opportunities for students to learn words over many weeks and in many different contexts to gain confidence in using the language independently (McIvor, 2020; Rorick, 2019). After a few classes, Eugema noticed that 10 minutes was not enough time for students to review and start something new. She stretched the Anishinaabemowin part of the class to 15 minutes to provide more opportunity for students to hear and use the language and not feel rushed. Additionally, as a language learner, she experienced the need to pause to think about what she would say next in Anishinaabemowin. She also let students know when she had mispronounced a word, admitting, "I should have said it this way." Eugema laughed alongside her students when she made mistakes.

Eugema used a puppet as a device for students to hear another voice (she changed her voice when speaking as the puppet) and for students to have a non-intimidating character to interact with using the language. In our brainstorming of future ways to enhance the learning experience, we came up with the idea that instead of only the instructor using the puppet, it could be passed around amongst students, so they can talk to the puppet or in the voice of the puppet.

She also provided print and visual materials with words using Anishinaabemowin and English phonetics to assist students in remembering pronunciations and meanings of Anishinaabemowin words and phrases in the songs she introduced. In her reflections while viewing the video clips with the university researchers, she noted that students became reliant on the materials, however. During the collaborative action research meetings, the three of us brainstormed ways that Eugema might support students to move away from dependence on the materials. She then tried the new approaches in subsequent classes.

Eugema also encouraged students to help each other by saying words that peers were having difficulty pronouncing or remembering when responding to questions or participating in other types of activities. She wanted to build students' confidence as fluent language users, and to provide models other than herself, of language users for all students.

Invite Student Input and Build on Students' Language

Although Eugema had been asked to follow the curriculum developed by her Indigenous colleague, William, she also wanted to respond to her students' needs. She learned from the focus group that students who had little fluency in Anishinaabemowin needed more time to hear the words learned in previous classes from more fluent students. This helped to remind them of the words, their pronunciations, and their meanings. The focus group data led her to call on the more fluent students before she asked the less fluent students to respond to questions. Additionally, as William has been part of this action research process, he would like to refine the curriculum for Eugema's class for next year so that the language is more appropriate for the age group that her students will be working with. William would also like to consult more frequently with Eugema in order to adapt the curriculum based on the group of students each year/semester.

Eugema also gathered data informally during classes, inviting students' input into the kinds of language they wanted to learn. As a result, she added Anishinaabemowin words and phrases for instructions and commands that are part of everyday routines in early learning settings to William's curriculum.

Eugema recognized the many dialects spoken by students in their communities, telling them, "For this class, we're using Anishinaabemowin from this area, but when you are at home, of course you'll use your own dialect." She provided opportunities for students to use their dialect, and in the process, all students heard a range of dialects.

In the future, drawing on what she learned from reflecting on the video and focus group data, Eugema plans to invite William, a fluent language speaker, to be a guest teacher in a few classes. She taught songs from the community where she was learning Anishinaabemowin, identifying who taught her the song and telling stories behind the songs. Students and William could do the same with songs from their communities. Eugema was taught that these ways of introducing songs ensure that the cultural knowledge is not lost throughout the generations.

Action Research and ECEs' Professional Learning

We close our paper by describing Eugema's insights on how engaging in collaborative action research has had a positive impact on her teaching and on her professional learning. We provide suggestions for ECE's who are interested in initiating their own action research.

Eugema's Reflections on Action Research

Watching the recordings of the classes with Naz and Shelley helped Eugema to gain a heightened awareness of how students were showing their levels of interest in the activities and confidence in speaking Anishinaabemowin, as well as the role that Eugema was taking. She wanted students to do more of the talking and observed closely how much of the time they were actually talking. She identified particular teaching strategies that seemed to be more supportive of students' speaking of the language, such as having written pronunciations available for them to read. By viewing the videos and talking about what she was observing over time, Eugema was able to pinpoint when students were ready to be more independent in speaking the language. She was able to take more time to hear and recognize how students were using the dialects of their communities and then in subsequent classes, provided greater opportunity for students to use their dialects.

Additionally, by viewing the videos with two friendly colleagues, she felt more comfortable in thinking and talking about ways to improve her teaching, especially because she, herself, is an Anishinaabemowin language learner. Eugema appreciated having additional perspectives and experience of Naz and Shelley to help generate new teaching approaches. The collaboration was especially helpful to enhance her teaching repertoire.

Suggestions for Initiating Collaborative Action Research

Early childhood educators who would like to try action research in their own early learning settings might start with the following:

Seek out colleagues who would like to explore and learn with you

Our experience shows that the ideal situation for action research is to collaborate with colleagues (one or many). You'll gain from having multiple perspectives and a wider pool of ideas to draw from when you're thinking about your research focus and the teaching approach you might try. Learning alongside others often draws you closer together, as you support each other when challenges arise and celebrate joys of new learning from your action research.

Come up with a research question

The problems and issues that you would like to resolve or learn more about should reflect something that is interesting and important to you and the children you work with. You and your colleagues may base your research on the same research question, or each of you choose a different approach and ask a different question.

In conversation with a colleague (the ideal scenario) or on your own, you might start with one of these two idea-generating activities:

1. Think about a particular teaching approach that you've wanted to try; one that you need a bit of support to try out. Create an action research question that starts with "What would happen if I (try the approach) to teach (whatever skill or concept you want to teach)?"

2. Think about a problem or concern that has either just surfaced or one that has been on your mind for a while. Brainstorm some possible approaches to solving it. Then, create an action research question such as: "How would (the problem situation) be affected if I try (one of the approaches that have come up in your brainstorming)?

Design your research

Your research question determines the direction you will take in your action research (Hubbard & Power, 2012). Your research may focus on children's learning of concepts or skills, or it may explore ways to support children's self-confidence and positive identities as learners and members of the classroom social group.

1. Plan how you will carry out the new teaching approach:
    a) number of children who will be involved
    b) what you and the children will be doing
    c) what materials you will need
    d) decide on a timeline for starting your teaching approach and more-or-less how long you want to continue it (this should be flexible as so many factors influence what happens in a day)
2. Plan how you will collect data to help you answer your research question–consider what kind of documentation will best help you to answer your research question. Aim to have more than one source (e.g., video- or audio-recordings of children engaged in the activity; children's drawings/scribblings/writing).

Carry out your action research

Try out the new teaching approach and carry out the documentation process. Meet with your colleague(s) when possible–informally through reflective conversations or in action research meetings where you set aside time to talk about what you are learning. Bring your documentation to your action research meetings. The documentation serves as your data sources.

When you and your colleague(s) look for patterns in what the children are showing you about their learning as they engage with you in the new approach, you are carrying out the data analysis process. As you talk about and reflect on your findings, it is very likely that you are also answering your research question about what happens when you try the new approach. In the process, you are also likely going to identify what worked well, and to generate ideas about how to improve on the approach in the future. You may also create a new research question that will guide future action research, thus exemplifying what action researchers call the spiral nature of action research (Castle, 2021).

Through reading about the story of our collaborative action research, we hope that ECEs will consider taking up action research in their own practice, finding our suggestions for carrying out action research helpful. We hope that you find the joy and excitement of new learning that comes with carrying out collaborative action research.

Author Bios

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ECE Voices

Welcome to ECE Voices!

ECE voices is a new feature in the AECEO's professional journal eceLINK. It is an open-ended section featuring contributions from educators and embodies the AECEO's commitment and dedication to listening to and lifting up the voices of RECEs and ChildCare Workers in Ontario. We are especially passionate about providing a venue for ECEs to use their voices about personal, political, and professional issues and experiences that are relevant to the sector. ECE Voices officially launched in the Winter/ Spring 2022 issue with its first submission by Adenike Ovundah, RECE, titled Practice-based evidence: Balancing research with lived experience: https://www.aeceo.ca/ecelink.

You can be part of ECE Voices too! If you have something to say, send us a contribution. Your contribution does not have to be a specific number of words or written in a particular style – every style and length is welcome: blog posts, poetry, creative writing, documentation of the amazing work you are doing/seeing in the field etc. Feel free to think outside the box! For more information about ECE Voices please email: info@aeceo.ca

In this issue of ECE Voices we are delighted to share the work of Roy Bailey, and his thinking and experience with Black excellence and Black futurities in ECE. This piece by Bailey engages with his thinking and experiences as a Black man who works in the early years sector in Ontario. Bailey engages with his lived experiences as a Black man, as an ECE, and his reflections on directions our sector can take to unlearn systemic anti-Black racism through inclusive and affirming pedagogies.

Confronting Anti Black and Anti Indigenous Racism Ideologies and Practices – The Unlearning Begins in The Early Years

Once again, the amazing month of black excellence/black futures was beginning (February – it is not lost on me that it is also the shortest month of the calendar year!). There is always so much I want to do in this month as a Black Canadian male educator in my classroom space, so many rich textbooks and stories that are now available for to use in my program/pedagogy.

Being born and raised here in the multicultural mosaic city of Toronto Ontario has given me such a rich cultural appreciation and understanding of so many diverse groups of people and languages that only the Toronto living experience can provide! I try my best to incorporate all these lived experiences into the materials I use and the way I always pride myself on teaching from an anti-bias/anti-oppressive framework/perspective.

These are not just terms that I throw out to be "politically correct" based on who my audience or listeners are at the time. These are terms that I live by daily and do my best to incorporate at all times in regards to the work that I have been doing in the Early Years sector over the past 25 plus years in the downtown core of the city of Toronto. Teaching and education are not just something I do; it is who I am.

As a profession, I feel that we have come such a long way in terms of including diversity in literacy and print in our classroom spaces in the various school boards within the city of Toronto and surrounding areas (Peel, Durham, Halton, York Region and Toronto). I remember being in my early informative years of education in

the west end of the city (Lansdowne and Bloor Streets – Perth Public School). I didn't see one book that represented me or my African Diaspora Heritage (Jamaican /Brazilian descent /heritage). At that time, there were not even dual language books from the plethora of languages that are spoken in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area. I don't want to date myself, however, I am describing the educational climate that I was a product of. Thank goodness for the public library and community centers in the area of St. Clair West Avenue where I was raised.

As a product of the Canadian society I was born and raised in, I have incorporated perspectives from many cultural backgrounds in my journey to becoming a mature citizen in our country, Kanata (Canada in Ojibwe) and in the city of Toronto, Tkaronto (meeting place in Ojibwe). I am/we are all a part of Turtle Island (the Canada, USA and Mexico landmass). The rich Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are part of the histories, cultures and languages of the original caretakers of this land, must be acknowledged and shared as an integral part of our Canadian society and cultural fabric. Both the Indigenous and Black perspectives of our history have such rich content and learning for all who are willing to be open to learning about them. For example, the Seven Grandfather Teachings and the Seven Principles of Kwanza (Ngubo Saba).

I would like to share a story from my teaching that illustrates how racism is internalized within students and what our responsibility is as educators to interrupt and disrupt racism in education.

One day I was doing a lesson about social justice with my full-day kindergarten class. We talked about the great Viola Desmond and how she was arrested and thrown into jail for one night in the province of Nova Scotia. We talked about why this type of injustice happened to her for not complying with the request of police officers to move out of an all-white seating section of a movie theatre. After reading the story of Viola Desmond a few more times during this week, I decided to do a group inquiry chart about this situation and see what language we could come up with as a classroom community to describe the situation/or make sense of the situation depicted in the story.

We started off by talking about what shades or colors of skin are considered good or bad. And how that translates to which people are good or bad. The data that was collected both shocked and saddened me as a Black Educator within early years of education. The class all agreed that the "good" colors are yellow, pink, white and orange. The "bad" colors were identified as brown and black. Seeing that this was the majority consensus of the class, I turned to my students and asked them, "So am I a bad color?" The students (many of whom were racialized students) paused and said, "You're a good teacher but the wrong color." This blew my mind. For weeks after I wondered how my students, who had known me for almost two years, could feel that I was a bad color. Where did they learn this so young? Why did the children who were also racialized hold this same view?

This group learning/discussion brought me to the understanding that there is a huge "unlearning" that must take place in our various school boards and spaces of academia in general right here in Canada. The systemic racism that our children and families face begins as early as the time they are infants in the childcare systems right up to and past Junior and Senior Kindergarten. If we, as educators in childcare and early years settings as well as in public education, are not an active part of the solution to combating hate and racial discrimination, we are adding indirectly to the problem. Silence is violence. One important and necessary way to be an active part of the solution is to have more print materials and literature in classrooms that celebrate, represent and depict racialized children and families in positive ways, as citizens in society, instead of perpetuating negative stereotypes that are commonly associated with racialized/non-white communities.

It is not enough to say we promote and support inclusivity, equity, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices and safe spaces in our work and school environments. Just like we constantly tell our students, "actions speak louder than words," it is high time for all educators and influencers in all spaces to be dedicated to the unlearning of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous mindsets that are shaping the opinions and attitudes towards children and people who are racialized in our Canadian society. If we work together as a teaching community, we can break these harmful mindsets that help to form negative implicit biases against marginalized groups within our society. We must give our children the tools to form healthy relations with all members of our communities. If not, we risk maintaining negative racist attitudes toward others that can form barriers to education and that our children may take with them throughout their education grades and further down on their academic and professional paths.

The conversations may be uncomfortable at first. But the more we talk about race, diversity and white supremacy in the early years, the easier and less painful it will become. At the end of the day we all belong to one family. That family is humanity that we all share blood in common. We can all make a difference in our own individual circle of influence on the attitudes we foster and communicate about other people around us. We truly can make this world a better place if we all try to crush these racist ideologies that the media and social networks are feeding our future generation. Now is the time to act! Every life matters!

Written by Roy Bailey, a Black Canadian, born and raised educator in the early years.

Building Leadership & Learning Communities Project Update: A Year in Review

It's hard to believe that we are in the final year of the Building Leadership and Learning Communities project. This past year has been filled with incredible experiences to support and empower Early Childhood Educators across Ontario. Each of the different project areas have been incredibly busy. Our transformative professional learning model provides a space where educators are given a platform to share their knowledge and experience and where participants have opportunities to communicate their learning and reflections with each other. AECEO Communities of Practice continue to provide spaces of belonging and relationship building led by care. We continue to work on communicating and sharing our work and learning through various presentations and written articles. The project team has also had the opportunity to work with an amazing group of Early Childhood Educators from various parts of the sector, the province, and intersectionalities to create a provincial conference that was by ECEs for ECEs. In line with the mission of the AECEO, we have connected and learned from each other, participating in positive change, and strengthening the collective voice of Early Childhood Educators.

Professional learning content that has been shared through the AECEO has been led by Early Childhood Educators. It started with a consultation with the sector, and has continued at the end of every session where participants complete a survey to inform future sessions. This survey works to understand if the session has been responsive to the educator's needs, and what types of sessions they would like to see upcoming. It is a space where the knowledge that exists within our field has been highlighted, and a space where ECEs are the speakers. This past year, we've been able to hear from the educators at the Learning Enrichment Foundation about how they're incorporating land-based learning into their practice. Students from Seneca College Early Childhood Educator Black Student Association (SEEBSA) shared stories and lived experiences of Black Joy, Black Success, Black Love and Celebration as a form of resisting all forms of racism. Other professional learning sessions have focused on allyship with the Ontario Aboriginal Head Start Association (OAHSA), sharing the importance of kinship and building meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities, as well as How to Become an ECE Speaker, hosted by Anisha Angella, in preparation for the 2023 AECEO Provincial Conference. The AECEO worked in collaboration with a committee of Early Childhood Educators in planning the conference for Early Childhood Educators. You can read more about the steps taken and thinking behind the planning in the article *Building a Transformative Conference* in the *eceLINK* Spring/Summer 2023 issue. Having the conference be created in this way had a profound impact on the ~900 participants that joined. You can read more about the impact of participating in the conference in the article in this *eceLINK* issue, *The Impact of a Transformative Conference* as well as the articles written and shared by presenters about their experiences.

This fall the professional learning calendar at the AECEO began with a session hosted by ECE Cress Spicer that focused on mindfulness and grounding techniques for Early Childhood Educators. This was a timely discussion taking place as we began the very busy academic year. While the AECEO recognizes the systemic barriers that educators live through every day and continues to focus our work on advocating for better policy solutions, we also understand the need for techniques that can support us in the moment. Comments from participants following the session such as "more of this; it seems like the ECE community really needed/needs this" and "Topic of session is widely needed

across the sector! Very important - thank you!" reinforced that this mattered to our community. We have also been extremely honored to welcome five ECEs, who are also AECEO Community of Practice Leads, to join together for a panel discussion on how the worth of ECEs & child care workers goes far beyond checkboxes and how we are more capable than ever to articulate our importance. Together, we focused on reclaiming our recognition and considered what each of us are proud to bring to our profession. Finally, this fall, we have launched a brand new endeavour; an ECE book club where we have been discussing *Scarborough* by Cathryne Hernandez over four bi-weekly sessions. Using a novel as the starting point, this project aims to create opportunities for early years professionals to read literature together. By exploring a selected text as a group we hope to create new spaces for imagination, possibility, and community. We look forward to sharing more about the winter professional learning sessions in our next update.

You may recall from previous project updates that one of the goals of the Building Leadership and Learning Communities project is to create and support AECEO Communities of Practice. AECEO Communities of Practice are not so much based on practice, but really about creating inclusive spaces that are focused on care and community relationship building for everyone in the early learning sector. We are so excited to share that the most recent Community of Practice that has started within our project is the Student Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (SECEO) group. This group has been active since January 2023 and is being led by Tammy Primeau McNabb and Camila Casas. We are so grateful for all of the students in Ontario who have joined the space and have shared your stories and experiences with us, and we truly look forward to collaborating on various ways that the AECEO can continue to support and build relationships with and amongst ECE students. Most recently this group has been discussing the importance of mentorship and what it means to have a great relationship with a cooperating Early Childhood Educator while on placement and the difference it makes when those cooperating educators are given the proper time and compensation to truly be able to mentor students in a meaningful and impactful way. You can reach the SECEO group through their instagram at @seceontario. We look forward to sharing news of the final two communities of practice that will be supported throughout this last year of the project in our next update. Stay tuned!

AECEO MINI COURSE

DIGITAL STORY TELLING

An exciting learning opportunity that took place in the last year within this project was the AECEO Digital Storytelling Mini Course. This was a collaboration between the Professional Learning and Community Organizing areas of the project. Safra Najeemudeen, Professional Learning Coordinator at the AECEO collaborated with the project team to create and deliver a workshop for Early Childhood Educators in AECEO Communities of Practice. The workshop asked educators to consider their relationship to their Community of Practice and to consider their personal narrative. Working in a story circle, participants crafted their stories, reflected and shared together and ultimately used a digital medium to share that story in a new way. We are working on sharing some of these stories through the AECEO website, with their authors permission. Take a look to find out more!

The project team is also very excited to have once again had the opportunity to connect with Dr. Laura Doan and the Peer Mentoring Program happening within the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) this year. The AECEO Community of Practice Leads joined the Peer Mentoring Project Facilitators to once again discuss the different contexts of our provinces and some of the things that have worked or maybe not worked within each of the models as both groups work to support Early Childhood Educators through community building. This relationship has also led to the project team having the opportunity to present at the ECEBC conference where Project Coordinator, Amber Straker, presented with Dr. Laura Doan, Professor and Peer Mentoring Program Lead, about the benefits of collaborating and learning from one another, and the different ways that our projects work towards a similar goal; supporting the early years workforce through relationship building, connection, and care. The duo shared a similar presentation at the AECEO conference, discussing the ways in which each of these programs work with educators to support educators, and shared stories from each program to demonstrate how these structures, when put in place, provide

the space and time necessary for educators to come together in care, connection, and advocacy; to raise each other up. The duo's final presentation took place at the Association of Early Childhood Educators Alberta conference, where Amber and Laura spoke about how participation in these programs supports leadership, professional development, and mental health and self-care of educators which leads to increased retention in the field.

AECEO members are so important to us. Your membership is what supports us in this work and is what makes all of what has been described above possible. The AECEO has been working to engage members through virtual membership meetings. Recently, the AECEO and early years community came together to create a visual prose submission for the AECEO 2023 provincial conference (see above graphic). This piece was added to the conference gallery, an opportunity for presenters to share short videos or photos in an alternate format to the presentation style. This was an incredible moment for our community to come together and discuss what it means to them to *be* an Early Childhood Educator, as opposed to the ideas that others impose on us. We highly encourage you to become a member or renew your membership with AECEO, and we look forward to connecting with you again soon.

In Memoriam

Dr. Diane Kashin

We were incredibly saddened to hear of the passing on January 1st of Dr. Diane Kashin, an early childhood educator, advocate, leader and inspiration. Diane contributed deeply to the early childhood profession, through her leadership, teachings, publications, collaborations, pedagogical leadership, and professional friendships.

Diane was elected to the AECEO Board of Directors in 2006 and served until 2012. She served on numerous committees and as Secretary, becoming President of the Board in 2010. Her contributions to the organization and the sector were immense. Diane's tenure encompassed an extraordinarily eventful and consequential time in the life of the AECEO and the ECE sector at large, and she led with passion and courage throughout - always prioritizing well being and growth for ECEs. During her time as President, Diane led the association in navigating change and planning for the future, bringing in new professional learning initiatives and a strong focus on advocacy and public policy, among her many other accomplishments.

Diane touched the lives of multitudes, and our thoughts are with her family, friends and the community. Thank you, Diane, for all you gave to the early childhood community.

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Special Issue: Disability Justice in ECE

Guest Editor: Maria Karmiris

Disability Justice in ECE—Foregrounding Counter-storytelling Practices

This special issue invites those within the field of early childhood studies to consider the role of developmentalism in continuing to shape some taken-for-granted assumptions within ECE. Specifically, both featured articles consider how practices of *sanism* and *ableism* remain unacknowledged default positions within ECE in a manner that perpetuates practices of exclusion or conditional inclusion. In the works of both Davies and Vale within this special issue, each has respectively applied concepts from the fields of Critical Disability Studies or Mad studies or the New Sociology of Childhood for the purposes of foregrounding counter-narratives.

The counter-narratives presented here contribute to an already vast and growing body of knowledge that demonstrates what happens when early childhood educators have decided that they already know the narrative storyline and how it will unfold. *Developmentalism* is indeed that narrative storyline early childhood educators are required to learn and know. It can pose and has posed persistent challenges within the field because of the ways in which children and early childhood educators themselves embody lived experiences that perpetually disrupt the normative assumptions that remain embedded within the narrative storyline known as developmentalism.

Thus, the two articles featured in this special issue offer counter-stories that identify the role of developmentalism in shaping the normative order within ECE. Davies does so by focusing on their experiences of conditional inclusion and exclusion as an educator within early childhood programs in Ontario. By focusing on their lived experiences at the intersections of disability justice and Mad studies, Davies invites readers to consider the perils of sustaining the hegemony of developmentalism while pointing towards the potential of facilitating opportunities for multiple storytelling and sense-making strategies. In a distinct way, Vale offers a consideration of how scholars and educators might attend to and foreground the voices of children diagnosed with ADHD in a manner that demonstrates how select children perceive themselves as well as experience learning in the early years through practices of exclusion. In so doing, both Davies and Vale consider the importance of refusing ableism as an ongoing default position within ECE in order to make room for practices of inclusion that might have the potential to welcome and embrace all forms of embodied representations and experiences.

As a guest editor of this special issue, it is my sincere hope that the articles featured here offer an entry point into what might be possible when scholars and educators seek to apply some, if not all, of the tenets outlined in a disability justice framework (Berne, 2015). Thus, I close this introduction with an echo of the question posed in the Call for Papers that initiated this special issue (Berne, 2015, par 25): "How do we move together—as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the orientation spectrum—where no body/mind is left behind?"

Berne, P. (2015). Disability justice – a working draft by Patty Berne. Retrieved on December 2, 2023 from: https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/disability-justice-a-working-draft-by-patty-berne

Including the Voices of Children with ADHD: An Invitation to Disrupt Normalcy

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Abstract

This paper shares knowledge of ADHD gathered from children's experiences and uses it to inform others. To do the supporting study, I leaned on the New Sociology of Childhood and on Critical Disability Studies and used a qualitative approach with an ethnographic lens. The findings show: (a) the knowledge children have of ADHD is connected to how it manifests in their lives; (b) lack of understanding from others may impact children with ADHD's self-concept; (c) making friends is difficult for children with ADHD; and (d) children with ADHD can offer valuable information on how others can understand them better.

Key words

children with ADHD, children describing ADHD, Critical Disability Studies, Disability Justice, the New Sociology of Childhood, research with children

Author Biography

Rory Vale has been working in the Early Childhood Education Sector for over ten years. She has had direct classroom experience with preschoolers and taken on leadership roles. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies. Having ADHD herself and having a child with ADHD have motivated her to write her Master's Research Paper on (and for) children with ADHD, in hopes of amplifying their voices and facilitating their understanding by others.

Including the Voices of Children with ADHD: An Invitation to Disrupt Normalcy

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has been extensively described over the years from a medical standpoint. Medical research defines it as a *neurodevelopmental* disorder that starts during childhood and characterises it as an "imperfection" of the brain that leads to various levels of "impairments" on executive functions, including attention and emotional regulation (Barkley, 2020). Research shows that an average of 7.6% of children have a diagnosis of ADHD globally and that this number is increasing (Salari et al., 2023). In Canada, data from 2018 shows the general prevalence of ADHD is estimated at between 5–9% for children and adolescents (CADDRA, 2018).

The high number of diagnoses and the scientific evidence for the benefit of early intervention (Miller et al., 2023) inspires researchers from all around the world to pursue studies about children and ADHD. Despite the multitude of publications that are available (see for example Barkley, 2005, 2014, 2016, 2020, 2022; Hallowell & Ratey, 2021) and the medical knowledge that is disseminated (for example, American Psychiatry Association, 2013; Wilens & Spencer, 2013), there is a key element to understanding this "disorder" that has been given little attention: what children with ADHD know about it based on their lived experiences. This knowledge and these experiences could play an important role in reframing the way ADHD is collectively perceived and decreasing the negative labels commonly placed on it.

The purpose of this study is to capture an understanding of ADHD from the perspective of children who identify as having ADHD. After listening to these children and gathering their challenges, feelings, and thoughts, I share their voices to demonstrate that being familiar with the ADHD jargon is not enough to fully comprehend children with ADHD.

Acknowledging the perspective of these children provides a model for how teachers, parents, and peers can listen to and understand the social experiences of those with ADHD that cannot be found in medical books. Reflecting the documented lived experiences and knowledge can help improve the lives of other children with ADHD by recognizing them as reliable sources of information about their lives and by fostering attitudes of appreciation, empathy, and support from others towards them.

Being a person with ADHD myself, I wish that when I was younger the people who were closer to me, particularly my parents and teachers, had known that it was *necessary* for me to constantly get up for bathroom breaks during lessons. This was in fact a way to help me focus, not an attempt to skip a class. Years later, after my son received the same diagnosis and was going through similar challenges, I wondered what he and other children who received labels of "unfocused," "restless," or "impulsive" would have to say if they were given the opportunity to voice their own thoughts. This paper presents this opportunity.

As I write this paper, I lean on the New Sociology of Childhood as a framework and place children's voices at the heart of this research. I also draw on Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and challenge the notion of able-body and -mind that sets normative expectations for people (see Campbell, 2009; Goodley, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2018) especially those with a "disorder" like ADHD. For this reason, I purposefully use quotes on all the words that are used to describe ADHD from a medical perspective that have a negative connotation and open the doors to new words that, as cited by Castrodale (2017), inform of different bodies, minds, and human attributes. One example of these new words is *neurodiversity*, which reflects the many different ways people think, learn, and behave. The term carries the concept that differences should not be seen from a deficit perspective and is commonly used to refer to disorders such as ADHD, autism, or dyslexia (Baumer & Frueh, 2021). Neurodiversity, as well as the frameworks proposed, are aligned with the Disability Justice movement, which focuses on each person's value for who they are and advocates that all bodies are seen for their uniqueness and strength (Berne, 2018).

In order to engage in an application of concepts from The New Sociology of Childhood and CDS, I used a qualitative methodology to capture experiences and knowledge from children with ADHD. I outline elements of this process in five sections that follow. The first section is the theoretical framework, which explains how the New Sociology of Childhood and CDS underpin this study. Next, in the literature review, I present other authors who engaged in similar endeavours. In the methodology section I go over my design, which was built with an ethnographic lens and used a focus group as the data collection method. The findings from the focus group are presented next. Finally, this paper concludes by setting the stage for discussion around the importance of listening to children with ADHD's voices and using these voices to promote awareness of the children's value, uniqueness, and strength.

The relevance of studies of this type for children with ADHD is unequivocal. It is time the world gained some perspective of ADHD according to how children see it and to what they want others to see. It is time to let the real experts talk.

Theoretical Framework

The New Sociology of Childhood and CDS are the essential elements that directed my decision-making process throughout the study. The first element places children as an active group in society, whose ideas are worthy of being listened to. Such a position has inspired a growing number of research subjects and methods that are child-centered and oriented (Swauger, Castro, & Harger, 2017). With that in mind, this study was designed to give participants the opportunity to play an active role in producing knowledge about ADHD. The second element, CDS, foregrounds a reflection on how the social value placed on "normal" bodies and minds excludes disabled people from society. Encouraging this type of reflection (amongst others) through this paper is one of the ways in which I can use my role as an educator to promote disability justice.

The choice of the New Sociology of Childhood as one of the theoretical frameworks does not come without challenges. It is not always easy to open space for children's expertise. While the concept of young people's agency and capabilities is generally recognized within early childhood studies, it conflicts with an old, and yet persistent, view of children as a vulnerable group in need of protection (Swauger, Castro, & Harger, 2017), where protection often comes in the form of control and exclusion.

To genuinely have children be the social actors they are capable of being, research needs to address their needs and ensure their participation is "truly emancipatory" (Swauger, Castro, & Harger, 2017, p. 6). Researchers need to see them not as adults in progress, but "to focus on children for the fact that they are children" (Kurt, 2021, p. 733). Listening to children's voices means abdicating control, facilitating comfortable expression, and honouring their wishes. In this study, I acknowledge the position of children as social actors and see their knowledge of ADHD as worthy of investigation and dissemination.

Seeing the participants in this study as the experts on their lives is particularly relevant when considering the intersectional identities they hold: being children and having ADHD, which is traditionally treated as a disability, which brings me to the second theoretical framework used in this study—Critical Disability Studies (CDS).

CDS blurs the boundaries between ability and disability and investigates how context, power, privilege, and oppression define historical physical and mental norms (Schalk, 2017). CDS emerged as a theoretical framework and a form of activism in the context of the culture of ableism: the "discrimination on the basis of ability, perceived or actual" (Campbell, 2009, p. 5). Goodley, Liddiard, and Runswick-Cole (2018) talk about how ableism imposes the collective expectation that happiness and success are intimately related to being autonomous, self-sufficient, and independent.

Abberley (1987) said:, "Disabled people are often only relevant as problems" (p. 93). To that point, too often, children with ADHD are treated as problems, which reflects how society responds to perceived impairment. As pointed out by Titchkosky (2000), it is not bodies or minds that cause these problems, but the interactions with society in its physical and social environment. Such interactions, determined by ableist standards, categorize many behaviours presented by children with ADHD as not desirable. Some examples of these behaviours are struggling to sit still, interrupting other people's conversations, or keeping their belongings organized. Because society dictates that a child should be able to sit still, wait for their turn to speak (especially when speaking with adults), and keep their items organized, many children with ADHD are considered to fall outside of expectations around autonomy, self-sufficiency, and independence. Adult guidance and interference are often needed to direct them to conform to these expectations, which may lead to feelings of invalidation and dismissal.

Using the CDS framework as a guide, I pose the following questions: What if sitting still is not an expectation? What if there is an understanding that children with ADHD can find other ways to focus, and there is no attempt to "fix" behaviours that do not necessarily need fixing (such as not being able to sit still)? What if, instead, the current repertoire of what is socially accepted is expanded? This last thought aligns with Minich (2016), who proposes a differentiation between medical studies of disability and studies of disability from the CDS perspective, with the latter suggesting that social norms should be questioned. Such a transformative concept invites a level of introspection around normativity and challenges a status quo "that assigns more value to some bodies and minds than to others" (Minich, 2016, para. 11).

For children with ADHD (and with other disabilities), the rewriting of social norms is imperative and should begin with a reflection on what actions can be taken to ensure the environments these children inhabit (such as their homes and schools) do not exclude them from fully participating in society. Castrodale (2017) speaks of "enabling pedagogies" (p. 51) as pedagogical practices that give space to disabled subjectivities through understanding how information is "accessed, (re)interpreted, and communicated and the ways this may (dis)advantage particular individuals on the basis of difference" (p. 52). For a student with ADHD, for example, the way that knowledge is communicated in most school classrooms (a teacher giving a traditional lecture while students sit and watch) may put them at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers who are considered to be neurotypical, since many children with ADHD are likely to be distracted by external stimuli or have challenges staying in the same position for long periods of time. Reframing the social norm that dictates good learning behaviour could benefit many neurodiverse learners, whose experiences should be considered when determining what constitutes "the right way to learn."

CDS guided this study, which aims to inform families, educators, and other children of the important knowledge, feelings, and experiences of children with ADHD and inspire necessary changes. Alongside the New Sociology of Childhood and its transformative call to value the capacity of children, including those with ADHD, these two theoretical frameworks underpin this study. Both frameworks support the vision of children with ADHD occupying an important place in society and being valued for their contributions to the understanding of ADHD. This vision is also encouraged by the undertakings of other authors who used their work to allow children to express themselves freely.

Literature Review

When I looked up ADHD on any scientific database, I encountered a large number of papers that were written from a medical perspective. Thus, to situate the reader, I considered it important to briefly describe these views, which are summarized in the subsection "Through a Medical Lens." When I narrowed my search to include elements of my theoretical framework and other work that had been done with children with ADHD, I was glad to have found other studies that, similarly to this one, focused on children, their feelings, and how to better listen to them. These studies are presented in the other subsections: "A Paradigm Shift," "Stigma and Identity," "Many Ways to 'Speak'," "Every Voice Tells a Story. And More," and "Moving Forwards Towards More." Through these subsections, I recognize the work of authors who have come before me and whose work supported my thought process when designing this study.

Through a Medical Lens

For many years, ADHD has been thoroughly studied and described through a medical lens. The Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada (CADDAC) defines ADHD as a chronic *neurodevelopmental disorder* that impacts all ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses (CADDAC, 2022). According to the CADDAC (2022), ADHD causes symptoms in the executive functions of the brain, potentially leading to inattention; difficulties in organization, time management, self-regulation, and emotional regulation; impulsivity; poor working memory and processing speed; and problems with mental flexibility/rigidity. Spencer et al. (2022) place ADHD "amongst the most common mental health 'disorders' in childhood" (p. 4), and Barkley (2020) defines ADHD as a "disorder" of self-control, with consequences in an individual's ability to regulate their actions relative to the passage of time and to understand the consequences of their actions. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5) classifies it as a *neurodevelopmental disorder* and defines it as a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). All of these definitions carry one thing in common: they frame ADHD as a pathology, a "condition" that impairs those who have it.

A Paradigm Shift

As evidenced above, the medical-psychiatric model of ADHD sees it as a pathology, as a condition that is outside of the norm, and as a problem. From my experience

with ADHD, being framed inside such categories invites a multiplicity of feelings that deserves its own space in research, such as feelings of inadequacy and lack. This study does not aim to shy away from medical knowledge or to deny its importance, but rather to expand the understanding of ADHD by including the perspective of children who live with it. To do so, I rely on the CDS call for "alternatives to deficit and medical views" (Balter et al., 2023, p. 49).

With that in mind, I steer away from relying on a paradigm that aims exclusively to "fix" what is outside of the accepted "norm" and open a dialogue to investigate what else there is to know about ADHD from a standpoint of children with ADHD. Honkasilta (2016) states that the uncritical reproduction of medical-psychiatric discourse in educational practices should be questioned, "as it is oversimplified and insufficient to understand the experiences of 'life with ADHD'" (para. 1). Likewise, I believe that to comprehend the lives of children with ADHD better, it is necessary to listen to them instead of exclusively looking through a medical lens. By opening space for teenagers in Finland to express their views around the label ADHD, Honkasilta (2016) found that their difficulties in building an identity detached from ADHD may be related to the excessive use of medical discourses in their homes and schools, with little attention being given to their thoughts. These findings warrant further undertakings that aim to listen to people with ADHD, such as this study, which focuses on presenting the experiences of children with ADHD and the knowledge they have of it.

Stigma and Identity

The literature on ADHD includes studies of children's views of ADHD in research and produces knowledge that is relevant to their lives and that can be applied to improve them. Many of these studies conclude that stigma is an important topic. One example is Moldavsky et al. (2013), who write on young people's experiences with ADHD and advocates for their perspectives to be accounted for. By describing their feelings of stigmatisation and discrimination, she opens doors to further investigation on what causes such feelings and what can be done to prevent them.

Similarly, Petry et al. (2018) use a student voice method to investigate the experiences of adolescents with ADHD in Spain. In this study, it was observed that participants mirrored a psychiatric discourse in their descriptions of ADHD while also mentioning their "experiences, feelings, distress, and coping strategies" (p. 5). The difficulties they experience, according to Petry et al. (2018) can be particularly noticed in the school environment, where the lack of support both from families and educators once diagnosis is confirmed suggest that the social variables that interfere with people who have ADHD are not taken seriously. Peddigrew (2023) uses a CDS framework to reflect on the feelings of inadequacy and stigmatisation people with Learning Disabilities (LDs) and/or mental "illnesses" and calls for further research to identify how stigma is internalised. She concludes by proposing that difference should be understood as natural, as opposed to "other than normal" (p. 154).

The three studies above show how the different experiences that children and young people with ADHD go through impact their self-image and identity. Through my research, I strive to give space for participants to share such experiences and feelings involved with them, so they feel their perspective matters.

Many Ways to 'Speak'

Amplifying children's voices through research is an initiative that requires understanding the multiple forms children can use to communicate. Pezzica, Vezzani, and Pinto (2018) use children's drawings to investigate the metacognitive knowledge of attention among children with ADHD. Children's drawings communicated "their emotional difficulties associated with the school environment" (Pezzica, Vezzani, & Pinto, 2018, p. 150). Such findings can be useful to inform children's parents and teachers of their difficulties and thus promote further conversations with children on what they think might help them thrive in their daily lives. A photo elicitation study done in Belgium by Coussens et al. (2020) gathers the perception of children with developmental disabilities (among whom were children with ADHD) about participation. This study suggests that children find their participation in life events to be more satisfying when they feel included by a mediator, such as their mothers. Coussens et al. (2020) show how other people can adopt attitudes to improve the lives of children with ADHD and other disabilities. Stafford (2017) questions ableism and adultism and how these constructs leave children with disability out of research, proposing that participant-centered methods like activity-based interviews be used to share the narratives of children with physical or neurological impairments.

The studies described above centre on the child as the main source of data and provide insights on how researchers can adapt themselves to children's unique

ways of communicating. The children's perspectives are elicited in an inclusive, encouraging, and age-appropriate manner. To this point, Einarsdottir (2007) emphasizes that children and adults have fundamental differences in how they see the world and communicate. Therefore, research that aims to understand children's lives should not only reflect such differences, but propose methods that suit children's interests, contexts, and individual ways of communicating (including non-verbal ways). By proposing a dialogue with children with ADHD that embraces how they wish to communicate, I hope to grant them the freedom to express themselves as they wish.

Every Voice Tells a Story. And More

As important as giving children their voices is understanding that these voices are shaped by a variety of circumstances and influences. In the study "Can They Speak?", Witeska-Młynarczyk (2020) describes her experiences doing ethnographic research in Poland with children with ADHD and the tensions in her pursuit to enable children's voices. She highlights that the voices of children are not always well articulated and can be "inconclusive, entangled and interdependent" (p. 47).

Witeska-Młynarczyk's paper concludes that children's voices should be studied in a relational and contextual manner and adds that "the way children's voices will be approached and represented is an issue requiring careful consideration and deserving an honest discussion" (p. 57). This view is particularly inspirational for my study, where children's words (or their silence) may speak of more than what their words are saying. Their communication may reveal the societal influences they are under, which must be considered in the analysis and discussion.

Moving Forward Towards More

Aside from the medical studies, the literature that has been presented and discussed here has one common element: it portrays different scenarios where the lived experiences of people with ADHD are looked at as the centerpiece of the investigation. As a result, the studies bring knowledge that is not limited to a medical perspective and that is essential to truly understanding what living with ADHD is like. The stories observed and told through a variety of methods share multiple ways in which individuals with ADHD internalize their experiences. Moreover, these experiences reflect the understanding individuals with ADHD are exposed to, as well as the discourses behind such information.

By addressing the gap in the literature that seeks to capture young children's understanding of ADHD in my research, I hope to foster a genuine sense of interest, appreciation, and empathy for these children, whose attitudes and behaviours are commonly misunderstood and frowned upon. Part of my inspiration comes from Muller and Kenney (2021). In their fieldwork with juvenile correction actors, they found that educators working with "at-risk" youth learned how to reframe "difficult behaviors—such as swearing, yelling, fighting, breaking classroom rules, etc." (p. 1243) after relating them to trauma experiences lived by youth. By doing so, they no longer took youth's behaviour as a "personal attack," and "new forms of attention and response to familiar and challenging behaviors" (p. 1243) were created.

Similarly, I hope to contribute to promoting a shift on how others relate to children with ADHD by disseminating information pertaining to the experiences lived by these children and the knowledge acquired from them that they would like to share with others.

Methodology

To answer my questions about the lived experiences of children with ADHD, I applied an ethnographic lens to "research with" children with ADHD, using a focus group as a data collection method. The choice of ethnography reflects the main research question: "What is ADHD for children with ADHD?" This question invited a thorough exploration of a phenomenon (ADHD) within a particular group (children with ADHD) through observing them in their natural setting. A focus group as the data collection method was the means to ask children the questions proposed and to expand on the data derived from observing children while they were engaged in the discussion. For the purpose of data analysis, I took into consideration participants' behaviours and interactions with each other and the investigator as much as their answers to the questions.

I acknowledge that ethnography is also linked to the lived experience of the ethnographer (Berry, 2011), and I allowed my subjectivity and my identity of someone who has ADHD to flow into the process. Guided by the ethical responsibility of benefitting the participants of this study, I followed a shift from plain ethnography to critical ethnography, which goes beyond simply collecting data and proposes to solve problems raised by participants (Naidoo, 2012).

An important note is that under ideal circumstances this study would have included the observation of participants in their environments (in their schools, for example), so that their activities could be captured as they naturally occur (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). However, due to time and logistical constraints, the focus group happened on Zoom. Although my initial feeling on using Zoom in this study was hesitation, I was encouraged by cases where this platform was used successfully in ethnographic research.

For this focus group, participants were selected using purposive sampling through advertisement on social media (Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook). Inclusion criteria were children of either sex, self-identifying as someone with ADHD, between the ages of 8 and 12 (grades 3 to 5), and able to understand instructions in English. The questions that initiated the discussion were built to elicit children's understanding of ADHD and what they considered important for others to know about it. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, participants were informed they were not under any obligation to answer a question if they did not want to. After ensuring participants were comfortable enough, the discussion was initiated with this opening question:

- "What is ADHD for you?"

This question was followed by:

- "What would you like your parents to know about ADHD?"
- "What would you like your teachers to know about ADHD?"
- "How about friends? What do you think is important for them to know about ADHD?"

When the discussion ended, children were asked if they wanted to add anything else.

Findings

To analyze the data, I used a combination of thematic analysis and observation of children's behaviour. As pointed out by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis involves an active process of reflexivity, where a researcher's subjectivity influences how data is sorted into themes and interpreted. Therefore, my experiences as an individual with ADHD played a role in how I identified patterns, codes, and themes.

How Children Describe ADHD

This theme encompasses how ADHD manifests in participants' lives, such as impulsivity, lack of focus or distraction, hyperactivity, and hyperfocus. The descriptions of each of these aspects reflected children's experiences that posed either a challenge or simply an aspect that was a part of their daily experiences. When B. says, "You get distracted easily," he is describing a challenge. Further, B. adds that his distractibility relates to things he does not enjoy doing, such as cleaning: "If you're cleaning with ADHD, since you don't like it, you're just gonna look around and when you see a single spark in the sky, you're gonna run, drop the broom, run everywhere, and then look for that spark." Another challenge described by B. is the impulsivity, which he illustrates by telling a story about the day he ran from his teachers: "I ran out of the school all the way home with teachers chasing me." Further, B. talks about hyperactivity and exemplifies how it keeps him awake at night: "I can't fall asleep 'cause I'm, I'm always too hot, too cold or I'm just wiggly or drawing (…) and whenever I try and lie down, boom (…) I'm just like a wide awake."

When B. speaks about his hyperfocus, on the other hand, it seems as though he is only narrating an aspect of his personality that comes through when he is doing an activity he likes: "Since I like researching, like, computer stuff, I can hyperfocus, or I like coding, so I can code, so I can hyperfocus on coding." Along the same lines, J1. adds: "It's like, you're super, like, if you actually like something you're doing, you'd be in your room, like, the whole day doing it, if you don't have anything to do." J2. added that basketball was an activity that would get him really involved.

An important reflection here is to understand what determines whether each behaviour described by participant constitutes a challenge. CDS shows how the world is built around an idea of "normal" (see for example Balter et al., 2023; Campbell, 2009; Goodley et al., 2018). Therefore, being easily distracted, which falls out of the "normalcy" zone, certainly becomes a challenge for many individuals with ADHD. Were the expectations around "normalcy" redefined, perhaps this particular aspect of participants' lives would not pose a challenge for them.

Regardless of whether each description by participants constitutes a challenge or an aspect of themselves that might even be helpful for some tasks, it was clear that their representations had similarities, but also differences, which were also observed in their behaviour during the focus group. These differences both in speech and behavior

mirror Witeska-Młynarczyk's (2020) findings that point to how children's voices should be studied in a relational and contextual manner. B.'s articulate speech seems to be the result of open conversations about ADHD with his parents. J2.'s silence, on the other hand, can reflect a variety of influences, from timidness to not being actively engaged in discussions about ADHD. Furthermore, these differences show that each individual having ADHD has a unique experience that cannot be generalized. Understanding these differences is important so that others do not make assumptions about what a person will be like just because they have ADHD.

Self-Concept

When asked about what ADHD was for them, it became clear to me that the repertoire of words that the participants associated with it carried a strong association of ADHD with problems. It seems that the medical-psychiatric discourse is still very prevalent among other people's representations of ADHD. To expand on that, I refer to Titchkosky (2000), who speaks about how medical and therapeutic disciplines produce knowledge on and about disabled people and how such knowledge influences the representations society has of disability.

The first word I heard upon my first question was "stupid," which was used by J1. to define ADHD. When I asked J1., "Why stupid?" he said that it was the first thing that came to his mind, and explained that actually, he was called "retarded" by the eighth graders: "Instead of stupid, I get called 'retarded' a lot by the 8th graders." The use of the "R slur," as described by B., sparked a very rich discussion between J1., and B. around the inappropriateness of the word, which resulted in the consensus that this word should not be used to refer to neurodiverse people. However, this is the word that, according to J1., was used to refer to him many times. The impact such a strong, offensive word may have caused on J1.'s self concept is something I would very much like to have understood better had I had the time. It was clear though, that the words—either "stupid" or "retarded"—were there in the back of his mind, as he showed no hesitation in answering the first question, what ADHD was for them, with the statement, "Being stupid and doing bad stuff."

Listening to J1.'s words makes me recall Peddigrew (2023) and reflections on the feelings of inadequacy and stigmatisation amongst people with LDs, as well as Moldavsky et al. (2013) and their reports on young people's feelings of stigmatisation and discrimination. Another aspect of having ADHD mentioned by J1. with potential to impact his self-concept negatively was the lack of understanding from other people: "Another thing that I feel like ADHD is, is that a lot of people don't really understand you. And they think you're just like a lot different." This lack of understanding, combined with the inappropriate words J1. heard about himself, indicates the urgency to spread more awareness of ADHD amongst the general population and in schools, as well as more advocacy actions towards the well-being of children with ADHD.

What They Want the World to Know

When asked what they would like their parents, teachers, and peers to know about ADHD, the participants had very clear ideas of what they wanted to say. They want their teachers to know that teachers need to "explain things over and over again in, like, a very easy way for somebody to understand" (J1.); that they (the children) "get distracted way easier than anybody else in the universe" (B.); and that they (the teachers) should refrain from giving them too much homework: "Stop giving us a lot of homework, 'cause we're probably not gonna do it." (J2.). As for their parents, J1. asks: "Be more easy on me because I get mad really fast." Finally, in regard to other children, they wish that they were not seen as "a lot different." Perhaps this would make it easier for them to make friends with others.

All of these statements have one common element: they are a call for change. For these changes to happen, all the actors involved in the participants' lives need to do one thing: understand them. This request for understanding is summarized by B. in a very well articulated appeal: "Just understand us for once. Just understand us (...). They just don't understand. Eventually they finally understand, but it takes, I have to educate them." B. is an elementary school boy who feels responsible for educating other people about ADHD. His profound level of agency transports me to Tuck's (2009) open letter in which she calls for a change from damage-based research to desire-based research. Tuck explains the need to move from research that is based on people's pains and that sees them as "defeated and broken" (p. 412) to one that captures people's desires and hopes and that "understands complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). In this sense, B. does not speak of himself as someone who needs fixing. He expresses the desire to be understood for who he is.

To create more access to the findings, I compiled the themes identified in the focus group into a short video[1].

The language used in the video is accessible (available in captions and audio) and easy to understand, so that the knowledge contained in this study and the messages that participants want to communicate can reach those who need to be reached: the parents, teachers, and peers of children with ADHD.

Discussion and Conclusion

Expanding the traditional understanding of ADHD by incorporating children's knowledge and experiences is an important step in enabling these children (and many more) to see themselves as full participants in society and in their lives, an important premise of the New Sociology of Childhood and of CDS. The knowledge gathered from participants also teaches an important lesson: that every individual with ADHD is unique and, as such, cannot be only defined by a diagnosis, especially when such diagnosis carries so much stigma and negativity. Furthermore, listening to what these children want to communicate to others is a way to encourage the re-thinking of norms that prevent these children from thriving in their environments (for example, the norm that children must have their bodies still while learning when it would be beneficial to many learners to be allowed to move while in class). By doing so, this research suggests that the perceived idea of "normal" must be confronted so that every child lives and learns in the way that best works for them and serves as an act of disability justice, inviting the reader to listen to children with ADHD's unique experiences and recognize in them strengths, desires, and wholeness.

I acknowledge there are a few limitations to this study. One of them is the small number of participants. The challenges with recruitment call for further studies that investigate the obstacles that prevent more families from engaging with research with their children. Another limitation was the use of a digital platform as the study location as opposed to a more natural setting. Although Zoom has been used with success for ethnographic research (Podjet, 2021), I believe meeting children in person would have given me the opportunity to have more meaningful interactions with them, as well as to observe their behaviours better. Finally, had I had the time, and had the logistical constraints imposed by the families' schedules been lesser, I would have held more focus group sessions, ideally until the content discussed amongst participants reached saturation.

Nonetheless, this study reflects the importance of amplifying the voices of children (with or without ADHD) and invites those engaged with these children to take the time to listen to them. Moreover, it disrupts the traditional developmental discourses and expectations by making the public aware of how children perceive ADHD in their own words. By providing an avenue for participants to tell their stories, this research challenges developmental and medical-psychiatric discourses and positions itself to be the beginning of a counter-story told by children with ADHD. I also believe a systematic change is necessary so that children with ADHD can be seen for everything they are, which is so much more than a collection of "symptoms" that make others deem them as "broken."

My hope is that we can recognize children with ADHD for their wholeness and uniqueness. My larger hope is that common attitudes towards them such as impatience, frustration, and prejudice turn into interest, understanding, compassion, and support. Finally, I want to inspire further research that allows many other children with ADHD to share their voices and life stories.

Using research as a means for participants to share their knowledge is enabling them to have agency over their lives, an important foundation in the New Sociology of Childhood and something I believe to be indispensable to truly understanding children's worlds. Opening the doors to these worlds is, at the same time, a way to learn about them and a tool to empower these children in environments that often exclude them. As argued by Goodley & Runswick-Cole (2010), it is important to consider the need to work with numerous forms of educational intervention that address the exclusion of disabled children. For children with ADHD (and with other disabilities), one of these interventions is exactly what this study proposes: giving them the stage and the spotlight. Being a curious audience that listens attentively to their stories and makes sense of them. To the audience, it is a bit of an adjustment, a necessary one. To the children, it is their whole world.

The stories shown here are more than data for a paper. They serve as an advocacy tool for the participants and for other children with ADHD. They show what it is like for children when they have a chance to be heard: it is liberating. But who am I to speak for them? Perhaps it is best to let another expert talk about that.

A Child With ADHD

Let me tell you about me
I am a child with ADHD
Sometimes it's hard for others to see
How the world is different for me
I have a thousand stories to tell
I bet you would love to hear them all
But some people who don't know me well
Make me feel so incredibly small
You see, some people treat me differently
And I think that's not good
'Coz I should be treated as everybody else should
I sometimes lose my temper
When I don't mean to
Then I regret and surrender
But my heart still feels blue
I love my Nintendo, VR, and TV
The problem is I forget about time
And see only right in front of me
Letting other things slide
But if you ask me about ADHD
I will say what's in my mind
That it makes me exactly me
Someone who is brave and kind
ADHD may come with a few "buts"
That some people like to judge
But then you know what?
I make the world more diverse
I am so glad you took the time to listen to me
You see, not everyone is willing
To pay attention to a child with ADHD
Who sometimes struggles fitting
So, thank you, it means a lot to me
And to all other children
Who live with ADHD
We just want to be happy
We just want to thrive
To be loved and respected
And to live… with Pride!

Vale, O. (2023), based on the poem by Chesterman-Smith, A (Vale, O. is a child with ADHD).

1 https://youtu.be/qNQXz4GnHH0?si=uisf5SblJ99r9ctB

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Mad Autobiographical Stories, Poetry, and Resistances within Post-Secondary Early Childhood Education and Care

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Abstract

This article engages readers with a Mad autobiographical poetry and storytelling approach by drawing from principles of disability justice and Mad Studies to share personal and autobiographical stories and poetry regarding teaching and learning within post-secondary early childhood education and elementary education. The author engages in autobiographical writing regarding their lived experiences within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) while critiquing the privileging of sanism within ECEC through developmentalist theories. Through the use of Mad autobiographical poetry, the author seeks to advance Mad narratives and stories in ECEC.

Key words

Mad Studies, early childhood education, madness, mad poetics, poetry

Author Biography

Dr. Adam W.J. Davies (they/them), PhD, RECE, OCT is an Assistant Professor in the College of Arts at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario. Adam's research interests are critical disability studies, mad studies, queer theory, and poststructural feminism in Early Childhood Education and Care. Adam's SSHRC-funded research includes: an investigation of men and masculinities in Early Childhood Education and Care in Ontario, Canada; issues of gay, bisexual, and queer men, masculinities, body image, and nutritional supplement uptake; and, mental health and illness and professional identity in pre-service Early Childhood Education and Care. Adam holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development, Sexual Diversity Studies and Women and Gender Studies from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

Mad Autobiographical Stories, Poetry, and Resistances within Post-Secondary Early Childhood Education and Care

"Madness need not be all breakdown... It may also be breakthrough" (Laing, 1990, p. 90)

I have always been drawn to stories as a way of making sense of my experiences and dreaming new worlds. Instead of being anchored in the current reality, I have been invested in imagining, creating, and dreaming new stories, which can evoke new possibilities. Indigenous writer and scholar Thomas King (2003) writes about the power of stories in informing societal understandings of people and communities by articulating how "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 2). Within early childhood education and care (ECEC), dominant stories involve notions of developmental preparedness, academic outcomes and readiness, early intervention, and ensuring the mental health and well-being of children and families. Textbooks, course materials, and assignment outlines that are used in post-secondary ECEC courses often convey stories to students and those who engage with them about the communities that they describe—stories about ability/disability and inclusion/exclusion (Davies, 2022, 2023a). These stories in and of themselves seem self-explanatory in their "goodness"; however, there are many other stories within ECEC that are non-dominant and contest the hegemony of orthodox child development theories and their associated histories. These non-dominant stories are not always heard, especially in post-secondary ECEC education.

In this article, I share my personal and intimate stories within ECEC. Stories shape us, including our beliefs, identities, and ideas regarding inclusion/exclusion (King, 2003; Titchkosky, 2003). Stories also shape notions of who is/is not expected to be included or imagined in stories about belonging. In this sense, stories are incredibly powerful. Part of the intellectual, aesthetic, and artistic work I engage in within this article involves unearthing some of the dominant stories about ECEC and how such stories create notions of *who belongs* within ECEC. To do this work, I engage with writings about disability justice (Kafai, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2015) and Mad Studies (LeFrançois et al., 2013; smith, 2018, 2020) to illustrate poetic storytelling about my experiences as a Mad[1], neurodivergent[2], queer, non-binary post-secondary ECEC faculty. By exploring my educational and professional journey within ECEC, I bring attention to how one dominant story and narrative—that of child development and "normalcy"—has come to shape ECEC professional practice and pedagogies and how this story has very *real* impacts on disabled and Mad educators who work within the ECEC sector. I hope that by sharing my vulnerability through stories and poetry and advocating for new relationships with and through madness, I can carve out space for disabled and Mad educators who might currently feel that they do not belong within ECEC.

Part of my sharing in this article involves Mad autobiographical writing and poetry (smith, 2018, 2020) that emphasizes my personal feelings, emotions, and experiences with madness while teaching and studying within post-secondary ECEC studies. The poetry is

[1] Here, I use the identity term *Mad* as a *reclaimed* term to refer to individuals who experience forms of psychological, mental, embodied, and/or emotional distress and whose behaviours, feelings, thoughts, and experiences have attracted psychiatric classification by psychiatrists, psychologists, and/or medical doctors. I realize there is contention about identifying as Mad. For individuals who are curious about the politics of Mad identity, I encourage you to read Le François et al. (2013) and Burstow (2013) amongst other articles and resources.

[2] To identify as "neurodivergent," entails identifying with diverse experiences, behaviours, thoughts, and feelings, which may or may not have gone under psychiatric and/or psychological classification, that classify you outside of normative ideas of psychological processes. Neurodiversity is not biologically or psychologically essentialist, meaning that the neurodiversity community embraces all kinds of difference in ways of interpreting the world and does not rely on psychiatric classifications, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, although individuals who have been classified as such might participate in the neurodiversity communities, movements, and activism (Walker, 2021).

provided as a counter-story to the dominant narratives within ECEC and to emphasize the affective and emotional elements of my experiences with madness (Cosantino, 2021; smith, 2018). In alignment with disability justice writings (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, 2022), the intention behind this writing is to emphasize the liberatory nature of disabled and Mad first-person narratives (Kafai, 2021; Sins Invalid, 2015) and to bring to the forefront stories that are often marginalized in ECEC education. However, it is important for me to begin by locating myself and how I have come to have the questions that I engage with in this article about madness and ECEC.

Locating Myself: Who I am in this Mad ECEC World

> Disabled people have always existed, whether the word *disability* is used or not. To me, disability is not a monolith, nor is it a clear-cut binary of disabled and nondisabled. Disability is mutable and ever-evolving. Disability is both apparent and non apparent. Disability is pain, struggle, brilliance, abundance, and joy. Disability is sociopolitical, cultural, and biological. Being visible and claiming a disabled identity brings risks as much as it brings pride. (*Wong, 2020, p. xxii*).

When identifying myself as Mad in the ECEC world, I often receive puzzled and confused looks. Most people are not aware of what it means to identify as Mad or with a Mad community, and there are many who can only conceptualize madness as a tragedy or medical phenomenon. To identify as Mad is to reclaim experiences with emotional and psychological distress and to critique pathologizing knowledge foundations that promote deficit ideas of mental, emotional, and psychological differences (Rashed, 2019). Despite ECEC frequently discussing relationships, there is still more work to be done in connecting ECEC post-secondary students and practitioners with communities that critique child development theories. Can stories that challenge the orthodox knowledge foundations in ECEC be brought forward? Might it be possible to imagine communities, such as disabled and Mad folks, who are currently only considered through exclusion and pathology, as a central part of ECEC pedagogies and practices?

It is by engaging with and reading disability justice literature and Mad poetry that I have found hope and community on days when I have felt that I have nothing to offer the ECEC field or do not belong. The above quote by disability justice and rights activist Alice Wong illustrates the complexities of identifying with disability—and madness—in any way and the *risks* that are taken when having open discussions about one's experiences with disability or madness in a frank fashion. In writing this article, I am aware that I make myself vulnerable by describing experiences and feelings in ECEC that are not often discussed. However, as Sara Ahmed (2023) notes, it is important to express these feelings—whether of non-belonging or exclusion—since "we do not feel what others feel, or we do not feel as we are supposed to feel. That's how we end up thinking about feelings, turning them into a resource" (p. 82). It is these Mad feelings—feelings that have been deemed potentially *pathological*—that I draw from as I describe my experiences teaching and learning within ECEC.

I have struggled to feel *true* belonging in ECEC. Belonging, as a felt emotion of being accepted and embraced for who you are, the perspectives you bring, and your identities and worldviews, has not always been a part of my experiences within ECEC. In my experiences, the single story (Adichie, 2009) of children and childhood in post-secondary ECEC is comprised of child development approaches and methods deemed scientific. Certainly, lived experiences pertaining to disabled and Mad people were not part of my post-secondary education and are still often deemed "fringe" epistemologies – in both ECEC and all levels of higher education.

As I completed my pre-service teacher education, I felt dissatisfied with the developmental perspectives I had been exposed to within my undergraduate and graduate education and knew that there had to be other stories regarding children and education that I was not aware of. I was appreciative of all the wonderful learning opportunities I had been provided and yet, still desired to be exposed to a language that could more fully describe some of my feelings of not belonging within educational spaces. As I navigated post-secondary education, I often felt as though I was moving through a space where I was expected to be a version of myself that I was not – and importantly, could not be. I was generally not drawn towards child development theories, especially the emphasis upon observation and assessment within early childhood education and elementary education. I was unsure if I would have the mental and emotional energy to fulfill what I felt were ongoing expectations to be constantly effervescent and joyous within professional practices with children, particularly as someone who experiences frequent depression and anxiety. It was and is not that I could not and cannot be a joyous person—however, I held a deeply felt sense that there was no room for

me to bring my whole self to my teaching and working with children, including my madness. I was also feeling burnt out after being in higher education continually throughout my adult life and feeling overwhelmed by an educational system not made to accommodate my disability needs.

As my chronic depression and anxiety worsened, I questioned if I belonged in early years education. Essentially, I did not know if there was space in ECEC or elementary education for someone like me. I felt like I could not express my mental health needs in practicum placements or be honest if my energy levels were lower or my mood was less upbeat. I felt exhausted and tired and that it was "unprofessional" to share my true emotions and inner feelings with others. With that, I turned to academic writing and graduate studies to reconsider and investigate my personal experiences and eventually entered into teaching in higher education within ECEC. Upon beginning to teach and work in post-secondary ECEC education, I came to realize that my passions really lie in writing and storytelling; that is, it is by sharing my stories, including potentially painful histories, that I can begin to imagine different futures that are inclusive of and affirming towards disabled and Mad people.

Autobiographical Writing and Counter-stories

Disability justice and Mad Studies writing emphasizes life-writing approaches that share the lived experiences of disabled and Mad people. Disability justice evolved out of a collective of queer, trans, and disabled activists of colour who mobilize art, cultural production and criticism, and performance arts to raise collective consciousness for issues pertaining to disability, inclusion, and accessibility (Kafai, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Sins Invalid, 2015). This collective seeks to mobilize the arts and storytelling as social activism and establish guiding principles to challenge the uncritical acceptance of ableism and sanism and the exclusion of disabled and Mad people and stories within society (Kafai, 2021; Sins Invalid, 2015). It is by discovering and reading the work of disabled activists and writers such as Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha's 2018 work *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* that I have felt validated in community and that there are others who can love and accept me as I am—without the need for any intervention or change in my mind, behaviours, feelings, or perceptions of the world.

Storytelling is a key feature of disability justice activism, carving space out for disabled individuals to share stories that are deeply vulnerable, intimate, and often come with risk to share (Wong, 2020). Autobiographical life writing, particularly disabled autobiographical writing, emphasizes the private and personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences of disabled individuals who navigate forms of societal exclusion and discrimination (Barrett, 2014). Autobiographical writing connects individual writing and narrative story retelling of life events with historical, cultural, social, and political systems (Barrett, 2014). Autobiographical approaches include narrative storytelling that can be used to bring personal experiences and narratives to the forefront of public social consciousness (Sklar, 2012). As Kafai (2021) notes in her writing on disability justice and Sins Invalid's activism:

> Storytelling as activism becomes remembrance, becomes genealogy. Sometimes the stories we tell about our bodyminds are the ones full of grit and sweat. They are the painful stories, the *I have never said this out loud* stories, the *This is the most vulnerable I have ever been* stories (Kafai, 2021, p. 77, emphasis in original).

Telling stories, particularly stories about madness and disability, is a political act because it is by sharing disabled and Mad truths—truths that society seeks to discount or discredit—that new futures and imaginaries can be created (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Through this act, I emphasize disabled and Mad storytelling as *counter-stories* (Lindemann, 2020) that encourage the sharing of first-person experiences as counter-stories and critiques of the status quo (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Wong, 2020).

Meanwhile, a counter-story is a "story that is told for the purpose of resisting a socially shared narrative used to justify the oppression of a social group" (Lindemann, 2020, p. 286). Counter-stories are narratives written by individuals from marginalized communities that seek to contest and challenge dominant understandings from the majority by providing new narratives that are not typically heard (Lindemann, 2020) and challenging stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination. Counter-stories challenge "master narratives" (Lindemann, 2020) or dominant narratives that are written by society and guide understandings of the social norms of groups of people and institutions (Lindemann, 2020). By bringing to the forefront experiences that are typically private, such as one's experiences with disability and/or madness, counter-stories strive to disrupt the normalization of forms of societal exclusion previously taken-for-granted (Lindemann, 2020).

Dominant stories of disability and madness in ECEC education construct disabled and Mad people through ideas of deficit and biomedical intervention. These stories become what Adichie (2009) terms "single stories," or

stories that represent marginalized communities through assumptions, stereotypes, and misunderstandings. Such dominant stories can be propagated through powerful stereotypical representations that are promoted within higher education programs and learning. An example of this is the emphasis in post-secondary ECEC upon child development or the ages-and-stages approaches, which conceptualize disability and madness through lack, pathology, and incapability (Davies, 2022). In essence, anyone diagnosed with a psychiatric disability or who experiences madness is assumed automatically to be incapable and potentially even dangerous to be around children and families (Davies et al., 2022a, 2022b). As such, the dominant story, or single story (Adichie, 2009) of disability and madness in ECEC becomes one of exclusion and incapacity. By engaging with counter-stories written by disabled and Mad educators, ruptures of the single stories (Adichie, 2009) of madness and disability as deficit can take place (Davies, 2022; Snyder et al., 2019). It is through emphasizing counter-stories that new potentialities for disabled and Mad educators in ECEC can emerge.

Mad Autobiographical Poetic Writing

In this article, I engage with Mad autobiographical poetic writing (smith, 2018, 2020) as a form of expressive writing of my personal experiences with madness. phil smith's (2018, 2020) work on Mad autobiographical poetic writing (smith, 2018, 2020) disrupts the erasure of Mad stories, narratives, and art in education. Mad autobiographical poetic writing involves writing that seeks to challenge biomedicalized and psychiatrized conceptions of madness by emphasizing Mad people's stories and personal experiences (smith, 2018, 2020). Mad poetic writings are intimate and affective in nature (Davies, 2023a; Cosantino, 2021) and involve the combination of autobiography, art, aesthetics, and politics, with a specific aim to bring Mad stories to consciousness (smith, 2018, 2020).

My creative writing follows Mad poetic ethics (smith, 2018; Cosantino, 2021), which employ aesthetic and poetic devices, such as bolding and emphasizing text, crossing out text to indicate present/absences, as well as purposefully placing text in different locations to counter ideas of linearity. Such stories and their aesthetic markings hang and linger (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022), calling for the reader to acknowledge the wholeness of the text. Importantly, these devices involve emphasizing the affective elements of my writing by bringing forward *mad feelings* that might be otherwise discouraged within ECEC. This is not to suggest that any specific feelings are "Mad" or that madness be associated with disruption inherently; however, my Mad poetry asks readers to consider what mad feelings that might be considered *pathological* typically could offer ECEC. As such, my Mad poems bring counter-stories forward and ask the reader to consider how disability justice and Mad Studies might lead readers to acknowledge the stories of those who have continually been erased in ECEC, especially disabled and Mad people. I encourage the reader to engage with these poems in a manner that is non-linear; that is, to feel free to read different sections instead of reading the poems through a neat linear developmental narrative—there is no beginning and end here.

Mad autobiographical poetic writing is in conversation with Mad Studies (LeFrançois et al., 2013), a critical, activist-oriented theoretical framework and critique of biomedical conceptions of "mental health" that continue to pathologize[3], subjugate, and harm those who have had experiences with mental health services and with psychiatric harm. Mad Studies critiques such medical/psychiatric markers, as well as the reliance upon medical, psychiatric, and diagnostic understandings of mental and emotional distress, often embedded within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This is not to say that all who engage with Mad Studies similarly critique biomedical psychiatry and psychology in the same fashion—there is room for a plurality of approaches and knowledges within Mad Studies that aim to critique various aspects of psychiatry, psychology, and biomedical approaches (Beresford & Russo, 2021).

Sanism

In my other publications (Davies, 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Davies et al., 2022a, 2022b), I have described how *sanism* (Perlin, 1992) is embedded within the fabric of ECEC, particularly in normative images of children and educators that are propagated in the sector (Davies, 2022). Sanism "describes the systematic subjugation of people who have received 'mental health' diagnoses or treatment" (Poole et al., 2012, p. 20). Sanism (Perlin, 1992) "is largely based on negative stereotype, myth, hyper-unusual events portrayed in the media, and popular misconceptions that

[3] Pathologization is closely tied to medicalization although the two processes are distinct; that is, pathologization is a process that deems a behaviour, thought, feeling, or act as abnormal and odd whereby medicalization is a process that deems medical intervention a necessity (Sholl, 2017).

reinforce pervasive negative prejudices" (LeBlanc-Omstead & Kinsella, 2018, p. 15). Sanism, as a form of structural discrimination that is enforced upon those who identify as Mad or who are otherwise perceived to be Mad (Poole et al., 2012), is reinforced through the expectations of educators in ECEC (Davies, 2022; Davies et al., 2022a). Sanism is embedded within other helping professions, such as occupational therapy (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016, 2018), art therapy (Ehlert, 2020), education (Castrodale, 2017), and social work (Poole et al., 2012) as helping professions and practitioners are expected to regulate and contain their experiences with madness for fear of being pushed out of their profession or receiving scrutiny from their governing regulatory colleges (Chapman et al., 2016; Poole et al., 2021).

Providing Counter-stories: Enter Disability Justice and Mad Studies

As I share personal stories about my experiences with disability and madness, I follow Titchkosky (2012), who describes how she is "methodologically committed to beginning in the middle of things" (see Titchkosky 2003, p. 209) since "people do not merely sit on the edge of human identities; we inhabit them, and they inhabit us" (Titchkosky, 2012, p. 84). The stories that I share are all in the midst of other stories, whether about madness, disability, education, children and childhood, or otherwise (Davies, in press). What I am sharing is only a *fraction* (Davies, 2021) of these stories and only a fraction of my own life histories. Therefore, I do not pretend that these stories are ever complete, nor do I feel that they are finalized. However, in sharing these stories, I hope I can guide the reader toward a semblance of understanding of my personal history, and how I have landed on the questions I have about early childhood education, development, childhood, madness, and disability.

Pathologization and Childhood

Throughout my life, I have felt the pressure of a narrow concept of normalcy upon my personhood as I have navigated educational environments that did not—and do not—understand my specific accommodation needs, gender and sexuality, or my overall "anxious" and neurodivergent predisposition. My experiences with madness and disability started from a young age, where symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) emerged through constant checking behaviours, fears of swearing or saying inappropriate words at the wrong time, and reassurance-seeking behaviours, as well as generally "dysregulated" emotions that had me often labelled as overly "sensitive" by teachers and adult figures in my life. As a feminine young boy, my "sensitive" demeanour was often pointed out by teachers and other peers at school; teachers were concerned about my propensity for overthinking other people's feelings and opinions of me, and peers taunted me and bullied me for my sensitivity. Essentially, I was marked as irrational and potentially *ill* at different times. My feminine gender expression often made me a target of teasing from my peers as I commonly felt alone at school and that I had few friends. Upon telling teachers about my experiences with peers, I could sense their potential annoyance with me and disbelief of my experiences.

Eventually, I stopped approaching teachers for help with the bullying because I could tell that they would either not believe me or not desire to assist me. I learned to stay quiet and keep myself out of the way. I ended up finding my escape in videogames, such as *The Sims* (Wright, 2000), (a life simulation computer game) where I could create new worlds that were safer and more inclusive, as well as fantasy books that would take me to faraway magical worlds to escape the reality of feeling misunderstood. I would become lost in dreaming as I immersed myself in these fantasy and self-created worlds and became more interested in imagining new worlds than participating in the current one.

In elementary school, teachers began to comment on the levels of anxiety I was exhibiting in class, as well as my inability to keep my schoolwork or desk organized. Challenges with desks, paperwork, remembering dates, and using my agenda emerged at a really young age. Most of my teachers would either scold me for my perceived disorganization or enforce rigid routines and accountability practices to improve my organizational capabilities. While I realize these were often well-intentioned, they still unconsciously communicated a message to me that I was inherently flawed and significantly different in how I moved through the world than my peers in my classes.

Upon starting to use desks after kindergarten, my teachers would commonly note to my parents how messy and disorganized my desks were and my elementary teachers would often keep me in from recess to clean my desk to try and discipline me. Comments on my "Learning Skills" section of my academic report cards continued reporting upon both my lack of independence in terms of the frequency of questions I would ask my teachers and check-ins with them

about my work, as well as my general disorganization at school. Teachers were becoming agitated with the amount of reassurance I required and my continual questions regarding my academic performance and classroom behaviours. Beginning to forget things, I remember one morning when I arrived at school having left my History project at home and was supposed to be presenting it in the first period. Upon being asked where my project was, I had to frantically call my parents and ask them to drive home and pick it up for me and drop it off.[4] While I was ultimately able to perform well academically in many classes, teachers doubted my organizational skills and I continued to lose confidence in my own ability to stay organized. Upon entering my undergraduate degree, I finally started seeing a psychiatrist and received various psychiatric diagnoses and began to access the accommodations and accessibility services at my university.

Entering Post-Secondary Education

Upon finishing my teacher education program and Master of Arts degree, I decided to pursue a PhD in Education and Women and Gender Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies. After struggling with my mental health throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I wanted to pursue further studies in education instead of working in the fields of elementary education or early childhood education (Davies, 2023b). Despite being an Ontario Certified Teacher and eligible to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators, I continued with further academic study and soon became immersed in and enamoured with cultural studies and critical theory.

A particular practicum placement was influential in my decision to not become an elementary teacher immediately. After teaching a lesson where I was assessed by my practicum supervisor, I was informed through my evaluation that I needed to embody the child-centred philosophy of the current school system to a higher degree or else, perhaps, find other avenues in the education system to explore outside of classroom teaching. Child-centred pedagogies and philosophies, while important in their emphasis upon meeting children where they are at and centralizing the voices and curiosities of children in professional practices, are also influential in shaping ideas of which educators do and do not belong in ECEC (Langford, 2007). As Langford (2010) describes in her critique of child-centred pedagogies from her professional experiences teaching in kindergarten:

> When I was a kindergarten teacher, a manual advised me that my classroom should be so centred on the children that a visitor would not be able to identify who I was. Rendering me invisible struck me as poignantly counter to attempts to raise the respect and status of early childhood educators and to include the teacher as an important member of the classroom community (Langford, 2010, p. 113).

This feeling of being "rendered invisible" (Langford, 2010) resonates with my experiences as I felt that I was unable to share my own access needs or anxiety concerns within classroom environments as child-centred approaches overwhelmed my senses through a sense of helplessness that I felt – almost as if I was unable to take any action that could be construed as redirecting the children's behaviour. Upon sharing that I have an anxiety disorder and that I was experiencing a high amount of anxiety in my current practicum placement, I was further encouraged by various mentors to work on my anxiety and reduce any teacher-directed interactions with students or otherwise find a different job outside of classroom teaching in education or another field. I offer this example with care and curiosity to bring about larger questions about ECEC – to engage in a reflection upon if and how educators can imagine themselves as mattering and important, as well as any access and/or accommodation needs that they might require. I share this experience to situate where my curiosities and critiques of child-centredness emerged from.

While I enjoyed working with children and teaching immensely, I often felt that the child-centred context of the kindergarten classroom I was in was not a good fit for my mental health needs and that there was little to no space for me to have my own personhood considered, let alone my experiences with mental distress, in the classroom.[5]

[4] I have thought with this example, as well as a few other mentioned pieces, in other writings as this memory has left an "imprint" upon me; that is, I remember the feelings of shame within my body as I realized that I had not even realized that I left my project at home until I arrived at school (Davies, in press). Elements of this story have been provided in other publications as these school memories highly impacted my understandings of myself as a young child.

[5] I share this experience with care and caution – not to be critical of my practicum placements themselves, but to bring to attention the forms of exclusion that can occur when we have one-dimensional molds of and expectations for pedagogy and teachers.

This experience left me with important questions and feelings of unease about child-centred and developmental approaches that I had yet to know how to put into words. The loss associated with this experience became almost identity shattering, whereby I questioned a career and identity path that I had spent my entire adult life cultivating. Feeling tired, lost, and discouraged, my madness became associated with a sense of a lack of competence and failure. *Was I a bad educator?* I did not feel that my disabled and Mad mind belonged in early childhood education and elementary education and specifically, I felt that my madness was potentially unwelcome. I decided at the time not to pursue future work as a teacher in the formal school system and instead focused on academic pursuits.

Throughout my doctoral studies, I was introduced to—and became highly committed to—cultural studies as a way forward and a discipline, if it can be confined to a singular discipline, as my curiosities about the world that I am a part of continued (Davies, 2023b). I have always been a curious and inquisitive person, but through my engagements with cultural studies, I was able to ask questions about normalized practices that reinforce structural inequities and hierarchies in the world of ECEC. Gaztambide-Fernandez and Cairns (2010) describe how the field of cultural studies is interdisciplinary in nature and involves analyzing "the ways individuals engage and make meaning of their relationships with others and with the institutions that mediate those relationships" (p. 356). I fell in love with cultural studies and critical theories as a way forward thanks to mentors and scholars from whom I learned throughout my PhD. I began to engage with questions pertaining to everyday life and entered doctoral research investigating gay men, emotional intimacies, and gay masculinities as it pertained to users of Grindr, a dating and hook-up application (Davies, 2021). I entered this area of study as a purposeful retreat from early childhood education and elementary education—I needed to move my focus to an area where I felt that exploring my personal experiences and curiosities through critique and deconstruction was a welcomed pursuit and I felt this might not be possible in early childhood education.

Entering Teaching in Post-Secondary ECEC

In Fall 2018, I received my first university lecturer position and found myself re-entering the world of ECEC at the post-secondary education level. This experience of teaching ECEC at the university level was reinvigorating in ways that I was not expecting; I experienced commonality with tenure-track and tenured faculty and mentors who took me under their wing and provided space for my thoughts and ideas. As a sessional instructor, I was able to build long-lasting friendships that I keep to this day. I was beginning to think that, perhaps, there might be space for me in ECEC after all and that critical theories and perspectives had a home in ECEC. The networks and connections I established through this experience were life-filling and affirming. I felt that I belonged in ECEC even though I did not adhere to the developmental status quo. I felt that my ideas were important. I still had questions about the connections between developmentalism and child-centred pedagogies, or how the emphasis on the individual developing child could position a form of educator who is considered *ideal* for scaffolding the development of the normative child (Langford, 2007, 2010; Saracho, 2023; Adriany & Newberry, 2022). However, after this experience of teaching in post-secondary ECEC education, I considered that there were individuals who believed that the field could be made of diverse stories and hold a place for different worldviews. I felt included.

In July 2019, I started a tenure track[6] position as an Assistant Professor in a post-secondary ECE program. Navigating the world of post-secondary ECEC education – as well as ECEC widely – in a tenure-track position has provided me with many challenges and wonderful opportunities while also underscoring the importance of bringing my madness to the forefront in my teaching, writing, and research. If, as Scottish psychiatrist, R.D. Laing (1990) notes, madness is not *only* a breakdown, but also a breakthrough, I have come into myself throughout these last four years and had many breakthroughs about who I am and what theories and perspectives matter to me. It is through these breakthroughs that I have begun to enter into my wholeness in who I am as a Mad person and what I believe.

Disability justice activist, Patty Berne (2015) describes *wholeness* as occurring when "we value our people as they are, for who they are, and that people have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity" (n.p.). I have certainly felt my madness emerge throughout my life in ways that have

[6] Having a tenure-track position affords a lot of financial privilege and job security that is difficult to achieve in a precarious academic market. Being tenure-track means that you typically spend five years as an assistant professor and then must submit a large application and references for job permanency and to receive tenure. It is important to note how this makes me both precarious and also very privileged and to note this to the audience.

left me feeling labeled as an outsider and on the fringes of acceptability in both ECEC and higher education. While I have often *felt* "out of place" or as though my madness is not welcome, it is by reading, thinking, and learning with and from disability justice and Mad Studies scholars, activists, and writers that I have found affirmation. Through learning to write my way through these feelings of exclusion, I have found inspiration and community and realized that there are many others out there who share the same questions about ECEC, even if I feel alone at times.

I have continued to have questions about some of the exclusions within child-centred and developmentalist pedagogies throughout my time teaching in ECEC.[7] My personal experiences have led to my questioning of what seems like an unquestionable "truth" in ECEC – child development and child-centred pedagogies. The impact of dominant developmental stories has been an inseparable link between early years education and developmental psychology to preserve "normalcy" (Gleason, 1999; Richardson, 1989; see also Davies, Richardson, & Abawi, in press). As articulated by Varga:

> Within the day nursery field, challenging the "gospel" of child-centredness, is heresy, tantamount to labelling oneself as *anti-child*. The tying together of the two words, development and appropriate, creates a conception of practice that is both good and essential. After all, how can one be critical of something that is "appropriate" and focuses on the central "truth" of knowledge about children—their "development" (Varga, 1997, p. 126, emphasis added).

This dominant story of ECEC remains one entrenched in sanism that reinforces the "developing able-bodied rational child" at the centre of professional practice. Ideas of child development that have evolved throughout the twentieth century are often taken for granted as a societal good—because how could one critique the idea of children developing and their health and well-being?

Critiquing the Single Story of Developmentalism

I describe this single story (Adichie, 2009) of child development and child centred-pedagogies to problematize it—I bring it forward to unearth these assumptions of how madness has become only known through pathology and exclusion in ECEC. Madness has never been welcomed in ECEC (Davies et al., 2022b). The monitoring of the mental health and well-being of future educators through quantitative psychometric assessments, for example, became a component of pre-service teacher education (Gleason, 1999; Varga, 2000). Pre-service early childhood education and educators who worked with young children were expected to conform to the tenets of child-centred pedagogies whereby they would normalize themselves to a highly regulated maternal disposition that could be learned through the scientific discourses of psychology and child development (Gleason, 1999; Varga, 1997, 2000).[8]

While there are many other important stories within ECEC that are joyous, this dominant interventionist story—the story of child development—still dominates much of the post-secondary and in-service ECEC world.[9] Disability justice and Mad Studies frameworks ask educators to engage with counter-stories and narratives that are non-dominant—stories that might even disrupt and make *messy* assumptions and beliefs regarding normalcy, education, children, and care (Davies, 2022; Davies & Greensmith, in press). Following disability justice principles (Sins Invalid, 2015), I share the following mad autobiographical poetry to present a narrative with madness that also acts as a critique of ECEC and a call for wholeness in bringing forward Mad knowledges and subjectivities into ECEC education (Davies, 2022, Davies, 2023a, 2023b).

[7] In critiquing child-centred pedagogy, I follow scholars, such as Varga (1997) and Langford (2007), who ask about the exclusions that the hegemonic status of child-centred pedagogy might propagate.

[8] I touch on this exclusion of Mad educators and teacher candidates in Davies (accepted).

[9] This history has also been described in terms of the shifts of the normative image of children and childhood within the lab school, child study, and post-secondary early childhood education movements in Canada. Please see Langford (2019).

Movement Forward with and through ~~Early Childhood Educator's~~ Madness

i choose here
to defy
defy the conventions of what—or who—you might expect
expect to be writing this article
do you expect me?
what does it mean
for someone
to be ~~un~~expected? (Davies,2023a; Cosantino, 2021)
maybe
to be expected
is to be
adjusted.
am i adjusted?
have i adjusted?
my stories
are our stories
stories of early childhood education.
what
stories
of
early childhood education
do we
listen to?
maybe
we all have different ideas
of what early childhood education
is
or can be.
or who
~~an early childhood educator~~
can be and become.
mad educator.
mad educator.
bad mad educator. (Davies et al., 2022a)

mad bad

~~an early childhood educator~~

~~an early childhood educator~~

~~an early childhood educator~~

when i am *feeling*

that i cannot bring my whole self forward

i am silencing

my

queerness

madness

neurodivergence

to be the educator

i am expected to be.

i cannot

be the person who

silences my madness.

hides my madness.

i

refuse

to live in

f

r

a

g

m

e

n

t

s.

i didn't know.

that being an ~~early childhood educator~~.

meant.

changing my~~self~~.

~~an early childhood educator~~

~~an early childhood educator~~

~~an early childhood educator~~

~~my. voice.~~

~~voice.~~

~~early childhood educator's voice.~~

you might think this poem disturbing.

d—i—s—t—u—r—b—i—n—g

does—madness—disturb—you?

how can someone *fit* when the w—o—r—l—d doesn't try and *fit* them?

~~and the educator.~~

~~the early childhood educator.~~

~~the mad early childhood educator.~~

Conclusion

My Mad poetry might not make "sense" to you—that is part of its beauty and promise. In their article on the potentials of subtracting developmentalism from ECEC, Delgado et al. (2020) articulate how "it is these processes of investing in the creation of particular kinds of subjects and subjectivities that, we think, pedagogists need to think with and unsettle" (n.p.). I have attempted to bring to the forefront a counter-story regarding ECEC to critique, unsettle, and challenge ideas of which educators do and do not belong in ECEC. Disability justice and Mad Studies frameworks call for such an unsettling of dominant developmentalist narratives and stories. By bringing together my personal autobiographical writing, Mad poetic writing, as well my current theorizing, along with other writings regarding the histories of ECEC, I present a counter-story regarding the sanist exclusion of Mad knowledges and subjectivities in ECEC.

If stories are all that people are (King, 2003), then it is a worthwhile endeavour to consider child development and developmentalism only one of *many* stories within ECEC. However, due to the sanist exclusion of Mad knowledges and educators from ECEC, educators do not often get to encounter Mad counter-stories within the ECEC field and sector. As such, I finish this article by offering my madness as a provocation to early childhood education by following disability justice and Mad Studies writings that emphasize first person accounts of experiences that promote new ways of considering both disability and madness (Wong, 2020). Mad autobiographical poetic writings (smith, 2018, 2020) desire madness as a necessary intervention—a disruption of the singular story (Adichie, 2009) of pathology that haunts ECEC (Davies, 2023a). Mad poetics harness *feelings* of non-belonging for aesthetic and creative inquiry that demand the creation of new worlds. To return to Laing (1990), madness might then not only be known as a breakdown, but a potentiality—a break-through—a rupture (Davies, 2022; Snyder et al., 2019) in creating a new world.

Piepzna-Samarasinha (2021) asks in her article on disability justice and healing: *"What does 'healing' mean to you/us?"* (p. 71). For me, it has been through sharing my counter-stories and being able to acknowledge and hold space for my madness that I have been able to heal and cultivate new relationships with myself and others. Seeking disability and Mad communities has been a much-needed healing modality for me. While medical and psychological interventions are one form of healing—a form that dominant society pushes on disabled and Mad people—there are many ways in which healing can take place. I now ask: what would it take to bring healing through disability justice and Mad activism into ECEC? How can educators honour the silenced and unsaid narratives and stories of marginalized educators? By thinking with disability justice and Mad poetics, it is my hope that this article begins this work.

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