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Summer 2025

AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation

Decent Work Project Update

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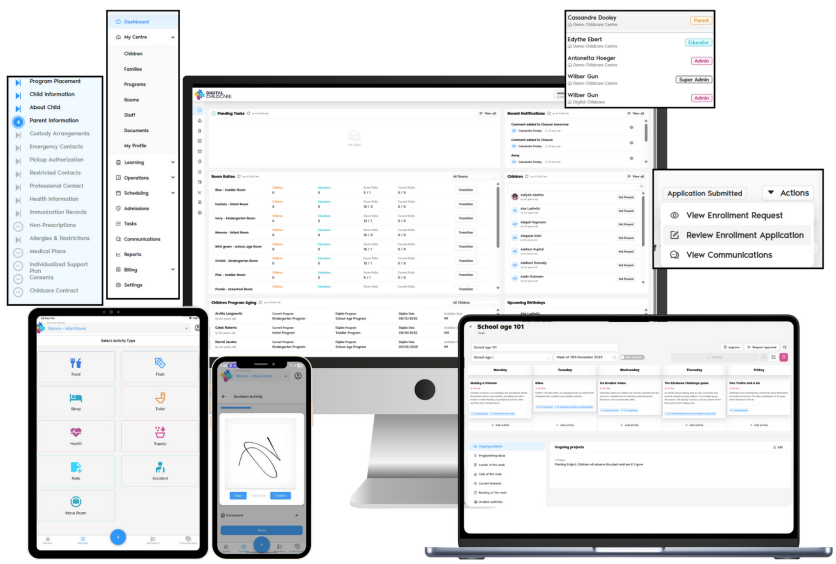

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AECEO MEMBERSHIP INSIDE BACK COVER

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COVER PHOTO: Child Care Centre on Charles in Toronto

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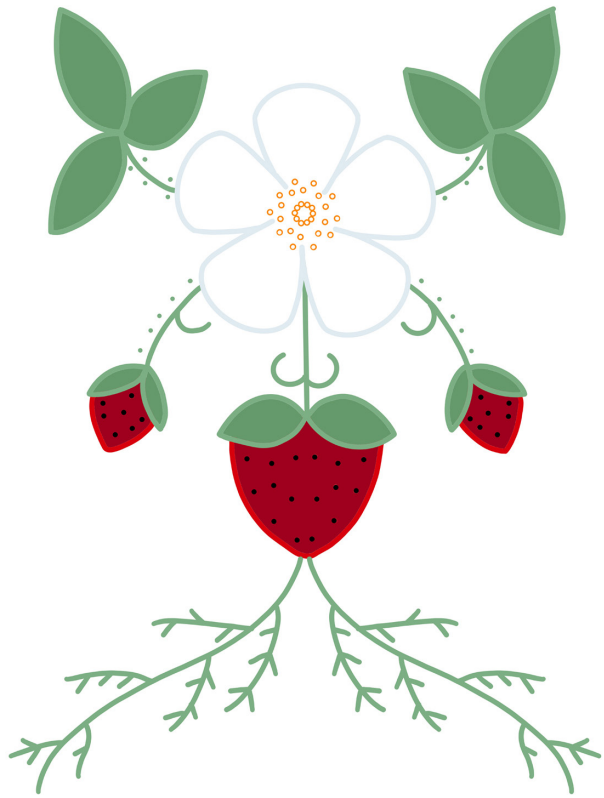
Introducing a Logo for the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation

In November 2024, the Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation decided to create a logo to enhance the committee's visibility, identity, and connection. Committee Co-Chair Sherry Lickers offered to contact the artist who designed the logo for the All Nations Child Care Gathering, held in July 2024, about creating a new logo for the committee. Throughout this process, Artist Lacey King-Smith (see bio below) provided the committee with five beautiful designs to choose from. All of the proposed logos were sent to committee members for feedback. It was a tough decision as all designs were wonderful, but one was preferred by those who responded. Lacey King-Smith explained that this design symbolises planting your roots like a family tree, demonstrating that everything is connected.

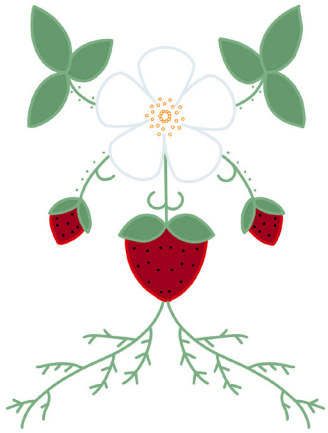


With gratitude and appreciation to all who participated in this process, we are pleased to present the logo for the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation.

Lacey King-Smith RECE

Lacey King-Smith is a rising artist from Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River. Their art practice is a self-valued creative outlet that is nature-inspired and takes root from childhood memories, wildflowers and animals, along with infusions of modern-day Indigenous issues in Canada with a twist of humour.

Lacey has completed two pieces that are permanently displayed at the Indigenous Place Keeping Space located in the TELUS Harbour Office in Toronto. They are also a featured artist at the Indigenous Art 2024: 49th Annual Juried Exhibition at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, ON. Additionally, Lacey has done freelance work with local businesses, including logo creation.



Who We Are: Voices of Indigenous Early Childhood Educators

As part of the AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation's ongoing commitment to bringing attention to Educators, this article focuses on Educators from diverse Indigenous communities. Committee members Sherry Lickers, Louise Humphreys and Wendy Rahman worked together to develop guiding questions and reached out to Educators in the Métis, First Nations and Inuit communities to invite and work with them to share their stories.

We are very grateful to Lacey King-Smith, Pauline McKay, Sarah Spethmann and Kahentiiosta Yen for your thoughtful contributions and willingness to share, and Sherry, Louise and Wendy for leading and facilitating. The following profiles are a testament to all of your work and commitment.

Kahentiiosta Yen

What inspired you to pursue a career in early learning and childcare?

From an early age I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher, in high school I volunteered in kindergarten classes, and completed co-op in a child care. After those experiences I wanted to continue in the field and went to school to obtain my ECE.

What do you find most rewarding about working with young children?

Supporting their growth through developmentally appropriate activities, learning about the child, and building on their interests, and continuing to guide children in their learning journeys.

Can you share a bit about your cultural background and how it influences your teaching approach?

I am Kanien'kéha from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, as a young child I attended a Mohawk immersion school and learned from the land. The teachings I received from the Educators have left a lasting impact on my life and my deeper understanding on how nature plays a role in the child's understanding of the world around them. I continue to use the knowledge and teachings I received to provide Indigenous teachings and the ways of knowing with children and families I work with.

In what ways do you integrate cultural knowledge and traditions into your curriculum or classroom environment?

Throughout the child care, there are words in Indigenous languages from the area I work in, I try to use the Seven Grandfather teachings when working with children, educators, and families. Emphasizing on the cultural knowledge and understanding of the world we are living in, the earth sustains our daily lives, and how to respect what we are giving.

Where do you find inspiration for your teaching methods and program development?

I have met so many amazing and wise individuals in my journey within early learning, I do try and gather information from various First Nations, Indigenous organizations, and community programs that provide Indigenous teachings for the early years.

What keeps you motivated to stay in this field? What factors would encourage you to continue growing in this profession?

My motivation is seeing the change in how Early Childhood Educators are being seen now, there is more professionalism, a better understanding for the early years, and how integral it is to continue pursuing the vast knowledge of children 0-6, which will lead in a better life, more kind children and adults. Having a deeper understanding of what is my purpose, how can I share my knowledge, culture, and background with others.

Kahentiiosta Yen is Kanien'kéha from Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Territory, Quebec. Bear Clan. She is the Child Care Director of Ska:na Family Learning Centre, working within 3 municipalities in the southwest region of Ontario. She holds a diploma in Early Childhood Education since 2005 and Bachelor of Social Work minor in Psychology from the University of Windsor since 2018.

Lacey King-Smith

What inspired you to pursue a career in early learning and childcare?

After I finished my first year at Sheridan College I needed to work. So my aunt got me a supply job at her daycare at Mississaugas of the Credit at Ekwaamjigenang Children's Centre. I pretty much just fell in love with the work and love working with the children.

What do you find most rewarding about working with the young children?

I like the big and little accomplishments children make and I just get excited for them, like putting on their own socks, potty training them, learning new skills like with scissors and learning using Anishinaabemowin words. It's very exciting watching children with all their milestones and seeing these little people become big people.

Can you share a bit about your cultural background and how it influences your teaching approach?

I'm from both Six Nations and Mississaugas of the Credit, so I am both Mohawk and Ojibwe from both sides of my family.

Our centre is Anishinaabemowin, so we learned about Ojibwe culture - we use Ojibwe language, and we have socials. Every Monday a cultural teacher from the elementary school will come with their children and we smudge. We smudge every Monday with all the children.

In what ways do you integrate cultural knowledge and traditions into your curriculum or classroom environment?

With our curriculum, when we do documentation, we also add our Seven Grandfather teachings to the documentation. So an example is, oh, this friend helped this friend, and we can say the Seven Grandfather teaching was love or was respect. So we use those Seven Grandfather teachings for our curriculum, and we just talk about it with our children, most of our older preschoolers understand the Seven Grandfather teachings. Seven Grandfather teachings are Love. Respect, Wisdom, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, Truth. We do drumming and we sing - and they love the bear song.

We have our key words posted in the room: Please, Thank you, Washroom, Washing hands, Go outside and our little hand drums and our shakers and our sticks. We also have a family wall, so they have pictures of our families, and it also has the Anishinaabemowin word and the English word.

When I was younger, I was in immersion Mohawk, so I kind of knew that and then I kind of lost it because I didn't go back to immersion or go back to classes. But I am starting to go into a Level 1 Ojibwe class because I still kind of struggle learning because I'm rolling my tongue with some words, but we do use the language a lot, we'll say, Ojibwe words: aanii, boozhoo, baamaapii - like, hi - bye.

We'll say the animals like bunny, waabooz - we just use simple words. Also when we are serving our lunch, we call it naawkwe wiisnidaa -like time to eat, and namadabin - sit down - some little command words. For milk we use doodooshaabo - like would you like more doodooshaabo or for water - would you like more nibi? We use simple words for these little ones.

Where do you find your inspiration for your teaching methods and program development?

Pretty much with the kids, because every group is different and you get inspired by these new kids coming in, coming out. It's really nice because we are connected to the elementary school and the older kids will come

say hi to us, they'll say, I remember when we did this, I remember we did that and then that kind of inspires me more because they remember me - I've impacted them in some way. So it's really nice to see the older kids say hi and stuff like that.

What keeps you motivated to stay in this field? What factors would encourage you to continue growing in this profession?

Pretty much my coworkers, we're a pretty good fit. We pretty much became like circle of friends - big family. We went through a lot of obstacles together and we made it.

And also the community that my centre is in, a lot of these kids that are coming in, the parents I grew up with. So it's kind of funny to see the kids I grew up with - their kids. And so it's nice.

There's always time to grow because there's always something different to learn with each child - every child's different. You've got to learn different tactics to help them, nurture them and help them with behavioral issues too. And just different families coming in, coming out, you just kind of grow. Like a tree you keep growing every little branch that you can.

How does being an artist relate to anything in your job? Is that helpful?

It's helpful because the kids always make me draw their stuff for them. Like, can you draw me a rainbow? Can you draw me a horse? Can you draw me a dinosaur? Can you draw this? Can you draw my family when I was on vacation?

The kids also inspire me to write books. I am in the works of writing a small, little series of books about words to help with Anishinaabe, like a little girl lost her moccasins, and she has to find them if they're up or down, just easy words for these kids to learn.

How is it different from the urban centres when you're on First Nations territory, to participate in early learning centres?

When it's nice out we do spend a lot of time outside. We have a nice trail that the kids can go in and sometimes we're integrating with the kindergarten program because in the kindergarten program here they spend 2 hours outside every day. They made a fort, where they have a fire, and they learn about fire safety. It's a really, really cool program that they have going right now.

Preschoolers participate in this too because they're going to start going into kindergarten in September. So we go to see how the program is and just get them used to the program for the fall.

We also have the Grandfather playground and in the Grandfather playground there's a little fire pit and that's where we smudge. And then we have another area of our playground, and it's the four medicines - it's our medicine garden. And then we have a green space - it's just like a big green space. And then we have our actual playground - it's wooden structures and wood chips.

Have you always worked at the Centre on the reserve, or have you worked at the urban site too?

I've pretty much just been on reserve. And it's nice too, because our community is so tight knit - just last week one of our Elders took our kids to the sugar bush and taught us how people made maple syrup. It was nice because it was pretty much just walking over to a field and the sugar bush is right there.

At our daycare, we pretty much just have a bunch of little Res kids running around. They love being in nature, love learning new things, they love to garden, and they love to help. When we did our medicine garden it was so nice to see. They're like, oh - we use this to smudge and I'm like or we give this tobacco to nature. We teach them that you have to give back to Mother Earth. So if they want to take some sticks or they want to take some rocks back to our playground, they have to give tobacco to Mother Earth, or they like to use as a trade - we're taking this, you could have this. Just some little teachings here and there. And it's so funny because they're really sporadic. They're not planned or anything. It's just very natural - if the situation comes, then we show them the teachings.

This is an edited transcript of an interview conducted between Sherry Lickers and Lacey King-Smith.

Lacey King-Smith is from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Lacey has been a Regis-tered Early Childhood Educator for nine years and is currently working at Ekwaamjigenang Children's Centre.

Pauline McKay

What inspired you to pursue a career in early learning and childcare?

I've always loved children since I was young. I started babysitting at a young age. My Mom was also an ECE supervisor, so I got a job working in her childcare centre part time when I was a teenager. I looked into other careers, but it was always child care that I was most drawn to.

What do you find most rewarding about working with young children?

It's an amazing feeling knowing you are playing such an integral role in the growth and development of these children. I love watching them change and develop self confidence. It's wonderful to witness them becoming their own person and continually learn new things. This job is so rewarding, and it is an honour to help guide these children in a good way.

Can you share a bit about your cultural background and how it influences your teaching approach?

I am Tsimshian (west coast of BC) on my father's side and Algonquin and Irish on my mom's side. Unfortunately, like many of us, I did not grow up learning my culture. My dad is a residential school survivor. He did not practice or even speak about culture while I was growing up. My grandma on my mom's side is Algonquin. Because of the time when my mom was growing up, there was a lot of shame in being Indigenous. It was definitely not something to be proud of back then. So it was not until when she was older, that she started to slowly learn about her connection to the Algonquin community. It was not until I was in my early 20s that I decided I wanted to learn more about my culture. I started attending pow wows and different community gatherings to learn more. I believe that this is the main reason why I love the work I do within the Indigenous community with our youngest children. I love learning along side the children and instilling that cultural pride from a young age!

In what ways do you integrate cultural knowledge and traditions into your curriculum or classroom environment?

One of the first things we do when we enroll new children into our programs is acknowledge their cultural background. It is important that the children know who they are and where they are from and continually hear how special they are because of this. Our program is for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children; so it is very diverse and ever changing in terms of the cultural curriculum focus. We do things like daily prayer and smudging, reading cultural stories, drumming, jigging, pow wow dancing, eating traditional foods and having Elders or traditional knowledge keepers visit our program regularly, to name a few. We also are guided by the 7 Grandfather Teachings, the Métis Values, and the Inuit IQ Principles in all aspects of our work. These teachings help guide our ways of working together with the children, families, and our coworkers.

Where do you find inspiration for your teaching methods and program development?

I am currently the Child Care Manager, however, when I was working more directly with the children, I was

always inspired by knowing how it feels to grow up without my culture and language. I always felt and still do, to an extent, that there was something missing in my life. It wasn't until I was older that I realized that it was that cultural connection and knowledge that was missing. I want to help ensure that the children enrolled in our programs know who they are and are proud of who they are, especially when they leave us to join mainstream society.

What keeps you motivated to stay in this field? What factors would encourage you to continue growing in this profession?

I cannot ever imagine working in a mainstream childcare centre. I just would not get the same fulfillment that I get working with Indigenous children and their families within my own community. I'm always so happy to run into former students from our programs who still remember me with fond memories. It's a wonderful feeling knowing that I've had a positive impact on their lives. It makes me feel like I'm helping to make a positive impact not only on their future but helping to better our community overall.

Pauline is a proud member of the Tsimshian and Algonquin Nations. She has been a Registered Early Childhood Educator since 2017 but has several years of experience in the field prior to this. She currently works as the Indigenous Childcare Manager for Makonsag Aboriginal Head Start in Ottawa.

Sarah Spethmann

What inspired you to pursue a career in early learning and childcare?

My journey into the early learning and childcare field began during my Grade 12 year of high school. At the time, I wasn't entirely sure what path I wanted to take for post-secondary education, so I took the opportunity to explore different options. Reflecting on my past experiences, I realized I had always gravitated toward roles that involved working with children—babysitting, coaching sports, and teaching dance. These experiences confirmed my passion for educating and mentoring young learners, though I wasn't sure exactly where it would lead.

When I began my early learning and childcare studies, I didn't fully know what to expect. However, as I immersed myself in my coursework and gained hands-on experience, I quickly discovered a deep appreciation for the field. Engaging with children, understanding their development, and fostering their growth became more than just a career choice—it became a passion. This journey has shaped my professional path and reinforced my commitment to providing meaningful, high-quality early learning experiences for young children.

What do you find most rewarding about working with young children?

One of the most rewarding aspects of working with young children is the opportunity to learn alongside them. Their natural curiosity and excitement for discovery create an environment where learning is a shared experience. Seeing the world through their eyes—full of wonder, possibility, and imagination—reminds me to appreciate the small moments and the joy in everyday experiences.

Children have an incredible ability to embrace the playfulness of life, turning even the simplest tasks into moments of joy and creativity. Their enthusiasm and energy make each day unique and fulfilling. Being part of their community of learners, where we grow and explore together, is truly special. It is a privilege to support their development, foster their sense of belonging, and help them build the foundation for a lifelong love of learning.

Can you share a bit about your cultural background and how it influences your teaching approach?

I am Métis, and my maternal family, originating from St. Boniface, Manitoba, later established roots in northern Saskatchewan. My ancestral roots trace back to the Letendre, Dumas, Parenteau, Piche, Parisien, and Falcon families. My Métis heritage deeply influences my teaching approach, as it is rooted in experiential learning and a strong sense of community—values that align closely with early childhood education.

In Métis culture, learning happens through hands-on experiences, storytelling, and passing down knowledge through generations. This belief mirrors how young children learn best—through play, exploration, and meaningful interactions. By fostering a supportive and inclusive community around each child, I strive

to create an environment where learning is a shared journey. Through play-based and experiential learning, I encourage children to develop a love for discovery, just as my ancestors did when passing on skills, traditions, and ways of life.

In what ways do you integrate cultural knowledge and traditions into your curriculum or classroom environment?

As a Métis educator, I incorporate cultural knowledge and traditions into my teaching by focusing on hands-on experiences, fostering a strong sense of community, and ensuring that the interests of the children drive learning. Métis culture values experiential learning, where skills and knowledge are passed down through active participation, storytelling, and a deep connection to the land—practices that align naturally with play-based and inquiry-driven early childhood education.

Storytelling, in particular, holds deep significance in both Métis culture and early learning. It is a way of passing down history, sharing knowledge, and fostering imagination. Through storytelling, children not only develop language and communication skills but also build connections to culture, identity, and community. Whether through traditional Métis stories, oral narratives shared by the children, or creating stories together through play, storytelling helps bring learning to life in an engaging and meaningful way. Incorporating this tradition into daily learning helps children develop a strong appreciation for different perspectives, strengthen their sense of belonging, and encourage creativity and curiosity in their exploration of the world.

Where do you find inspiration for your teaching methods and program development?

I find inspiration in many places—through collaboration with co-educators, in nature, and within different environments. However, at the core of my teaching and program development, the greatest inspiration always comes from the children themselves.

I rely heavily on careful observations of the children to guide all curriculum decisions. By paying close attention to how they interact with materials, engage with one another, and express their existing knowledge, skills, culture, and connection to their communities, I can create meaningful and responsive learning experiences. This child-led approach ensures that programming remains relevant, engaging, and reflective of their interests, fostering an environment where curiosity and exploration thrive.

What keeps you motivated to stay in this field? What factors would encourage you to continue growing in this profession?

The opportunity to share knowledge about foundational early learning practices and pedagogies keeps me motivated in this field. Over time, as I have taken on various roles within the field, my passion has evolved beyond working directly with children to advocating for the profession as a whole. I am deeply committed to helping parents, guardians, and other professionals understand the complexities and significance of the early years.

When I reflect on my growth in this profession, my focus always returns to the educators. They are the backbone of early childhood education, and their well-being and professional development are essential to quality care and learning. To continue thriving in this field, I find it vital to be part of a passionate early childhood community—one that values collaboration, continuous learning, and advocacy for the profession.

Sarah Spethmann is a Métis citizen and has been a Registered Early Childhood Educator since 2012. Sarah currently works at the Métis Nation of Ontario as an Early Learning Specialist.

Let's Fall in Love

By Susan Ramsay

"Children and young people have the right to relate to a school in a way that is similar to falling in love."

~ *Massimo Recalcati*

It was the first morning of our study week in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Educators from Canada, Australia, and the United States had gathered expectantly to learn more about the Reggio Emilia Approach - an approach that has influenced Ontario's early learning pedagogy and kindergarten program, as well as pedagogy in other Canadian provinces, in Australia, and many other countries throughout the world. When the words of Massimo Recalcati were shared from the podium by an Italian pedagogista at the Loris Malaguzzi Centre, you could hear a pin drop. Our note taking paused as we processed this notion that school should and could be a place that drew children into learning with enchantment and love.

As educators we do experience joyful moments in our programs and classrooms with young children, but in Canada, at least, envisioning our educational systems as engendering feelings akin to falling in love each and every day is still a stretch for many of us. Our educational systems narrow our gaze to seek out and prove that children are moving along an expected developmental and academic trajectory. And in our programs and classrooms we talk a lot about children's 'behaviours', and how to work with children who have 'special needs'. What exactly did these Reggio Emilia educators mean? How can they create a feeling of 'falling in love' with school for all children?

Their explanations intrigued us.

The environment:

"We think of this (falling in love with school) in a systemic way. Children must feel beauty. They must inhabit space for research and discovery. This means the space is concrete but also filled with imagination. Everything is considered carefully. The atelier is considered as carefully as the dining area. No spaces are more important than another. If we believe the child is integrated between mind and body, our school spaces must be integrated, including spaces indoors and outdoors." (Maddelena Tedeschi)

The child:

Though the eyes of Reggio Emilia educators, there are no children with 'special needs'. There are, however, children with 'special rights', and these children, like all children, are seen as capable and rich in potential. Their 'rights' are to be understood and supported in ways that offer them possibilities for expression and participation. The Reggio Emilia Approach is rooted in an understanding that every child embodies 100 languages (and more) that shape and define who they are and who they are becoming. Educators strive to tune into these varied languages with respect and appreciation. They choose to focus on children's curiosities, strengths, and what is just slightly out of their reach to achieve independently (Vygotsky's zone of proximal development). They dismiss the idea of comparing children to other children, or to strategize how to get children into the box of expected classroom norms.

The teaching process:

At the centre of the Reggio Emilia Approach is relationships – between children and children; between children and adults; between adults and adults. Each of these pluralities of relations are considered carefully by educators in their early learning programs. Neither child nor adult is a blank slate. We are all constructing the dynamics of learning through negotiation.

They believe that it is essential for children to enjoy spontaneous, creative, and free experiences where teachers observe, learn, and try to understand what children are questioning. Teachers learn from the children through this deep listening, enabling educators to bring an informed intention for children's engagement and learning that blends both adult and child knowledges. The learning experiences are negotiated and shaped with the children.

As the study week continued, those of us gathered from around the world could feel ourselves falling in love with the ways their infant-toddler centres, preschools, and schools engaged children in clever and insightful learning, in participation with the larger community, and how it reinforced to all children that they were seen, heard, and appreciated for who they were.

And I wonder:

What do children need to feel that sense of longing to learn with other children, educators, materials, and spaces in our programs? What do they need for time to feel as if it is standing still through their engagement and discovery of new ideas and possibilities? What do children need to fall in love with learning in our programs and classrooms?

What do we need to do, be, and believe to make that happen?

Susan Ramsay: susan@earlylearningcafe.com

THE TREE WE ARE.

By Elena Ivachtchenko

There is a tree standing strong with the branches spreading outwards and upwards. The trunk is straight and wide. The roots, hidden in the soil, give the tree incredible hold and keep it- invincible. There are thousands of leaves on the tree. Some are visible and freshly green, and some are just breaking free of the buds' tight embrace.

In the fall the tree sheds its leaves. It bends in the wind. Its branches get broken. It gets wet in the rain and frozen under the snow. The sun burns the tree. But the tree is here refusing to go down. The early gentle sunshine always blows life into the tree and the cycle repeats.

The trunk of the tree is the knowledge from all generations of educators who were here before us. They tried, they made mistakes, they learned, they passed their beliefs to us. By doing this they kept the tree alive, its roots went deeper down to the ground and gained a robust foothold for the tree. The tree branches are educators. Some are older and longer, while others are younger and more delicate. The severe storms broke some and they fell. From the roots to the trunk, from the trunk to the branches there comes the nurturing elixir of care, love, kindness, and courage. It streams to the tree babies, the leaves. With the tree sap's power and the branches' protection, they will grow and soon leave the tree. Other leaves will appear seeking support from the plant.

The tree is not alone. Birds, insects, and animals come here to find shelter. They are the tree community looking for protection and wisdom.

I am a branch of the tree. With the hold of the trunk and other branches, I am getting wider and stronger. The leaves that grow with me are happy and healthy. While staying they share their young lives with me. They don't rush to leave in the fall. When they finally do, they whisper their last goodbye. I am touched. I send my farewells in return. I know that I will be looking forward to the spring that brings new attachments to me.

I belong to the tree. The more I grow the more twigs grow on me. The more leaves appear in the spring, the more roots mature. The stronger the branches are, the stronger the tree against the winds, rainfalls, cold, and sunburns. Whether fallen leaves will stay close or travel afar they will nourish the earth, keeping it safe and fed. They won't forget the warmth and love of the tree. And the tree will remember everything.

Decent Work Project Update

Mobilizing the Early Childhood Workforce in the Movement for Decent Work

Written by: Amber Straker

It has been such an incredible first year of the sixth chapter of the AECEO's Decent Work project. We have been busy connecting, collaborating, and caring out loud with educators across the province. Throughout this past year we have been responding to challenges, rallying together, sharing stories and experiences, and more. We have come together in community, which has been foundational in supporting one another through the ongoing challenges of the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) sector and in our pursuit of decent work and professional pay. Through not just one, but *two* snap elections, the AECEO has remained committed to taking the time to consult with, listen to, and engage the ELCC sector. We have continued to grow our understanding of the challenges faced and are continuing to mobilize to advocate for positive change. A massive thank you to all who completed our *"How can the AECEO be better?"* survey last fall, and to those who participated in our *Listening and Storytelling Community Research* this winter. Your responses have helped to guide the work of the organization and support our continued advocacy. Your responses are incredibly valuable, and we will continue to amplify them in our future policy requests, campaign messaging, and advocacy work.

Student Connections

AECEO staff have continued to work with and support multiple placement and internship students again this year. Our very own AECEO Membership Outreach & Policy Analyst - Rachel Neville - earned an award from Toronto Metropolitan University for her outstanding mentorship! Students who complete their placement at the AECEO focus on building leadership and advocacy skills and complete an independent project with support from the staff team. To highlight and share the work being done by students, we created the AECEO Student Blog on our website. Check it out here: https://www.aeceo.ca/student_blog.

Thank you to all the post-secondary institution faculty who have invited us into your classrooms to meet and discuss the AECEO and our work with ECE students. We are grateful for our connections and your continued support. When meeting with students, we discuss the challenges our sector faces, the multiple ways that ECE skills can be used as advocacy skills individually and for their community, and how coming together strengthens our collective voice for positive change. One faculty shared that, "The students were left motivated regarding ways they can contribute to the exciting changes taking place! You have left them empowered and excited about how they can help shape the future of Early Childhood Education."

Community Building

We are so happy to welcome to our movement the Parents for Child Care (https://www.childcareontario.org/parents), organized and housed with our project partners the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. This new CARE Collective brings 2,200 parents ready to stand up for lower child care fees, more spaces, and for ECEs and their foundational role in the early years system. With parents and educators sharing space and

collaborating, we are able to better understand each other's experience and share knowledge and actions to work together for a system that will benefit everyone. AECEO CARE Collectives have continued meeting regularly for community check-ins and conversations, knowledge sharing, support, and to feel understood. They have also hosted workshops and guest speakers, presented at conferences, discussed anti-Black racism with the CECE, gotten involved in days of action, held town halls, and spoke on town hall panels.

In March, the AECEO had the incredible honor of spending time in person with students and educators in the Waterloo region in the first of our *AECEO Community Visits.* We presented and tabled at Conestoga College and hosted an event with educators at a local cafe. While engaging in an activity together, educators shared the top challenges they face in the field. Low wages, lack of respect/recognition, and ratios/class sizes were three of the most common responses along with a recognition of the need for high quality outdoor environments. When asked about their greatest hopes for the sector and themselves as educators, the top responses were all related to compensation and working conditions. Educators know exactly what they need governments to do to provide decent work and enable more educators to stay in the field in the jobs that they love.

Our next *AECEO Community Visit* took place at the end of May in Peterborough. Here, we had the wonderful privilege of meeting with students, educators, supervisors, and parents. We presented at Fleming college, hosted an ECE event at a local cafe (very similar to the event in Waterloo), toured local child care centres, met with and spoke at the Early Years Planning Network, and hosted a parent drop-in event. Being together in joyful and meaningful ways is key to building our power as a community and creating the hopeful worlds ECEs deserve! Thank you so very much to everyone who took the time to join us. We look forward to sharing about and collaborating on future visits.

Government Relations and Advocacy Work

We have continued to meet with both the Federal and Provincial governments to continue building relationships with government officials and to ensure that the voices of ECEs and the ELCC workforce are included in current and future policy directions. These meetings have also been opportunities to ask questions and find out more information about recent policy announcements that impact the ELCC community. In the fall, AECEO Executive Director, Alana Powell, met with then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau while attending an Advocacy Summit hosted by Child Care Now. There, she spoke with him about the concerns of the ELCC workforce as he shared his hopes for the new $10 a day program. We also joined Child Care Now and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care for 10 days of action for the $10 a day child care plan, where we shared the needs of the sector during this time of system building. We also hosted *Voices for Change* webinars to encourage allies to share their stories, had a rally at Queen's Park, facilitated a phone zap, and hosted a social media campaign sharing the experiences of both educators and parents within the new $10 a day system.

Early in the 2025 new year, the Federal government offered extensions of the $10 a day agreements with all provinces and territories. Ontario reached an agreement *in principle* but did not finalize and sign the agreement extension. We will continue to put pressure on the Ontario government to sign on to the agreement, knowing that there is still much work to be done to ensure that this system has the foundation it needs to be successful. Stay tuned for more advocacy actions to come on this issue.

In April, when the province called a snap election, we were consulted by the provincial Green and NDP parties on their platform creation as it related to early learning and child care. With only a few weeks before Ontarians went to the polls, we hosted a session called, *At the Heart of Care; Your Values, Your Future, Your Choices*. During this session, we discussed how our values are seen in and lived through policy and systems. AECEO members

were invited to join our next session titled *We had an election, what's next?* to regroup and refocus on our next steps after we learned the outcome of the election.

What you Missed on… Circle Time with the AECEO

Through our new podcast, *Circle Time with the AECEO,* we have had the opportunity to share an in-depth look behind the scenes of the work of the AECEO. In episodes 2 and 3 *Alana Leads the AECEO with Care*, AECEO Executive Director Alana Powell shares her insights about non-profit organizing and policy work, and how the AECEO is striving to make transformative change for Ontario's ECEs and child care workers. In episode 4 we share a love letter from the AECEO for ECEs on Valentine's Day, and episode 5 shares more behind the scenes about the CARE Collectives. Episodes 6 through 8 share about the AECEO's experience becoming unionized, with an episode from the staff bargaining team, an episode sharing the supervisor's perspective, and one connecting with CUPE Child Care Coordinator, Christina Gilligan to explore what unions are and how they are relevant to early years professionals. With new episodes regularly released, tune in to hear about all things ECE; the good, the bad, and the sticky.

Alongside our new podcast, we are pleased to share the launch of our merch shop with ECE and AECEO specific designs. Check out our Redbubble store (https://www.redbubble.com/people/AECEOntario/shop), to share with a colleague or pal, or to treat yourself!

Additional Updates

The AECEO has been very grateful to have been hosted as guests on three different ELCC podcasts. Find our episodes below:

STRIVE's Leading Inspired Learning: Introduction to the AECEO (https://www.striveswo.ca/podcast-posts/ep-39)

Leading Change Network's Voices of Change (https://www.changeleaders.ca/voices_of_change_episode_2)

Inspiring to Educate: The Power of Advocacy: Elevating Early Childhood Education with AECEO (https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/the-power-of-advocacy-elevating-early/id1653253619?i=1000689645485)

We have presented at the Dufferin County Early Learning and Child Care symposium, as well as the Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) conference, rallied together with the early years contingent at International Women's Day, participated in the Equal Pay Day lunch and learn, and attended the Atkinson Summer Institute. Plus, our very own Erin Filby was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal for her work advocating for ECEs, and her contributions to advancing ELCC in Ontario and in Canada. We are so proud of Erin for this well-deserved honour.

Stay tuned to learn more about upcoming events, news, and our next campaign, which will focus on putting the pressure on the provincial government to develop a wage grid for educators here in Ontario. It is a privilege and a pleasure to continue to do this work with you. We look forward to what comes next!

Embracing Autism in Childcare Settings: Building Inclusive Communication Practices

By Cassie Steepe, Training & Learning Specialist

Sonderly: The Learning Division of Geneva Centre for Autism

Introduction

Working in early childhood education is a deeply rewarding experience, offering the opportunity to shape young minds, support diverse learning styles, and foster a sense of belonging in every child. Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) play a crucial role in creating environments where all children, including those with autism, can thrive. One of the most fulfilling aspects of this profession is the ability to make a lasting impact on a child's development by recognizing and nurturing their unique strengths and needs.

Take, for example, Emily, an experienced ECE who recently welcomed a three-year-old autistic child, Leo, into her childcare classroom. From the beginning, she noticed that Leo communicated differently from his peers. While he was non-speaking, he expressed himself through gestures, facial expressions, and occasional sounds. Emily was eager to support him, but she realized that she needed to deepen her understanding of autism and communication strategies to ensure Leo felt included and understood. With a commitment to learning, she sought out training, consulted with specialists, and collaborated with Leo's family to implement effective communication techniques. Over time, she saw remarkable progress—not just in Leo's engagement, but in the way his peers and fellow educators interacted with him. Her dedication reinforced the powerful role ECEs play in fostering inclusive and supportive environments for all children.

As educators in the field of autism, it is our responsibility to create an inclusive environment that fosters communication, social interaction, and learning for all children, particularly autistic children. In childcare settings, communication is an essential component of inclusion, yet it often presents challenges due to varied communication methods. By implementing strategies that build on communicative attempts and teaching others to recognize them, we can create a more welcoming and supportive space for autistic children.

This article explores professional practices and learning approaches to embracing autism in childcare settings while promoting effective communication and inclusion. By sharing knowledge, embracing individualized strategies, and fostering a culture of acceptance, we can empower both educators and children to grow in a supportive and enriched learning environment.

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Understanding Communicative Attempts in Autistic Children

Many autistic children communicate differently than their neurotypical peers. Some may use verbal language, while others may rely on nonverbal gestures, sign language, picture exchange communication systems (PECS), augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, or echolalia. Recognizing and reinforcing these communicative attempts is critical in ensuring that autistic children feel heard and valued.

Varied communication methods may limit a child's access to reinforcers or opportunities to gain other skills learned with a peer because:

- Peers or adults may not socially reinforce the communicative attempt, leading to feelings of frustration or isolation.
- Peers or adults may unintentionally punish the communicative attempt by dismissing or discouraging it (e.g., "Why are you repeating me?").
- The child may stop initiating communication altogether, which can further impact their ability to receive reinforcers and build meaningful relationships (Wolfe et al., 2019).

By actively acknowledging and encouraging these communicative efforts, educators can facilitate increased social interactions, engagement, and language development among autistic children.

Strategies for Enhancing Communication and Inclusion

1. Reinforce Pre-Verbal Initiations

One of the most effective ways to promote communication is by reinforcing pre-verbal initiations. When children attempt to communicate—whether through gestures, facial expressions, or vocalizations—responding positively encourages them to continue these efforts.

Implementation Tips:

- Acknowledge and respond enthusiastically to all attempts at communication.
- Use affirming body language (smiling, nodding, and maintaining eye contact when appropriate).
- Expand on their attempts by modeling additional words or gestures.
- Encourage peers to recognize and respond to these attempts as well, fostering a socially reinforcing environment.

2. Model New Forms of Communication

Autistic children learn through observation and repetition. By modeling new forms of communication, educators provide opportunities for children to expand their expressive abilities.

Implementation Tips:

- Pair verbal words with gestures or visual supports to reinforce meaning.
- Use any form of augmentative communication tools, such as pictures, when modeling language.
- Narrate daily activities using simple, clear language.
- Encourage peer interactions by teaching children how to respond and communicate effectively with their autistic classmates.

3. Use Communication Temptations and Constructed Situations

Children learn best when communication opportunities are built into their daily experiences. Setting the stage for frequent practice can significantly enhance their ability to develop and refine communication skills.

Implementation Tips:

- Place preferred toys or objects slightly out of reach to encourage children to request them.
- Offer choices frequently, requiring children to use communication to indicate preferences.
- Introduce playful situations where communication is needed, such as giving a child a closed jar and waiting for them to request help.
- Use turn-taking games to foster interaction and verbal exchange.

4. Foster Peer Understanding and Inclusion

Educating peers about different communication styles helps create a more inclusive and accepting environment. Teaching neurotypical children how to interact with their autistic peers can lead to meaningful relationships and increased social engagement.

Implementation Tips:

- Conduct classroom discussions on different ways people communicate.
- Role-play scenarios that teach patience and understanding when communicating with an autistic peer.
- Encourage peers to use alternative communication methods, such as gestures or picture symbols, when engaging with their autistic classmates.
- Highlight and celebrate diverse communication styles within the classroom setting.

5. Set Communication Goals and Track Progress

Measuring progress in communication skills is essential for ensuring ongoing development. Setting individualized communication goals and tracking progress allows educators to tailor their strategies to meet the needs of each child.

Implementation Tips:

- Identify specific communication goals based on the child's abilities and needs.
- Use a progress-tracking system to record communication attempts, reinforcers, and successes.
- Share progress with parents and caregivers to create consistency between home and childcare settings.
- Adjust strategies as needed based on the child's evolving communication skills.

The Importance of a Supportive Environment

Creating a childcare environment that embraces autism and diverse communication methods benefits all children. Inclusion fosters a culture of acceptance, reduces stigma, and enhances the learning experience for neurodiverse and neurotypical children alike. By implementing strategies that reinforce communication attempts, model effective interactions, and educate peers, educators can build a more inclusive and supportive community.

The Role of Play in Communication Development

Play is an essential part of early childhood learning, and for autistic children, it serves as a powerful tool to build communication skills. Naturalistic strategies that foster engagement while teaching communication and play skills include:

- Planning activities around the child's interests.
- Imitating the child's play to build rapport and encourage interaction.
- Waiting with anticipation to encourage the child to initiate communication.
- Providing choices to promote decision-making and verbal or nonverbal responses (Amsbary et al., 2021).

Playful Ways to Build Communication Skills

Incorporating interactive and engaging activities can significantly enhance a child's ability to develop communication skills.

Some playful approaches include:

- Reading books together: Encouraging joint attention, vocabulary building, and storytelling.
- Interactive games (cause and effect): Helping children understand the power of their actions in communication.
- Nursery rhymes: Providing repetitive and predictable language that supports verbal imitation.
- Simple turn-taking activities: Encouraging back-and-forth interactions to develop conversational skills.
- "Peek-a-boo": A classic game that fosters engagement, joint attention, and anticipation.

Peer-Based Instruction

Peer-based instruction involves teaching children ways to engage with their autistic peers in positive and meaningful interactions. This approach minimizes the need for adult support while increasing peer interaction and acceptance.

A simple way to get peers involved:

- Have them demonstrate an action to an autistic peer.
- Have them share reinforcement to encourage cooperative play.
- Provide choices or increase requests at snack time to encourage social exchanges.
- Use video modeling: Record short clips of peers during pretend play. Autistic children can benefit from watching these videos, as they observe various utterances and interactions they can replicate.

Here are some typical examples of peer interactions in a childcare setting, along with feedback and praise that educators can provide to encourage inclusion:

1. Staying Close

- Example: A neurotypical child, Mia, sits near her autistic peer, Liam, while they play with blocks. She stays nearby without wandering away.
- Educator Feedback: "Mia, I love how you are staying close to Liam while he plays! That makes it easier for you two to play together."

2. Getting a Friend's Attention

- Example: Noah waves at his autistic friend, Oliver, and says, "Oliver, look at my train!"
- Educator Feedback: "Great job, Noah! You got Oliver's attention by calling his name. That helps him know you want to play!"

3. Asking a Friend to Play

- Example: Sophia hands a toy car to her autistic friend, Ethan, and says, "Want to race with me?"
- Educator Feedback: "That was so kind, Sophia! Asking Ethan to play gives him a chance to join in."

4. Sharing

- Example: Ava notices her autistic friend, Jake, reaching for a toy truck, and she hands it to him without being asked.
- Educator Feedback: "Ava, I love how you shared the truck with Jake! That was very thoughtful."

5. Talking to Their Friend

- Example: Lucas sits next to his autistic classmate, Lily, and describes his drawing, "I'm drawing a big sun!" even though Lily hasn't responded yet.
- Educator Feedback: "Lucas, it's great that you're talking to Lily and telling her about your drawing. That helps her feel included!"

By reinforcing these behaviours with praise, children are encouraged to continue engaging positively with their autistic peers, fostering a more inclusive childcare environment.

Conclusion

Embracing autism in childcare settings requires a commitment to understanding and supporting diverse communication styles. By recognizing and reinforcing communicative attempts, modeling new forms of communication, setting up structured communication opportunities, fostering peer understanding, and tracking progress, educators can create an inclusive environment that nurtures meaningful interactions and relationships. Through these efforts, autistic children can gain confidence, access reinforcers, and develop vital communication skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

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“Not for the Faint of Heart”:

Cultivating Daily Creativity for the Resilient Early Childhood Educator

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By: Ashmeet Parmar-Saroya

The Early Childhood Education field continues to face significant challenges, including the acute shortage of qualified educators, meager earnings, and considerable workload. There is a widespread agreement that these challenges often contribute to stress, burnout, and a high turnover rate among Early Childhood Educators. From my experience, the idiom “Not for the faint of heart” has become notably relevant to the field of ECE. Having worked in the field for over two decades, I acknowledge that there is no distinct character profile of an ECE, yet who the ECE is, profoundly influences children’s experience in early learning environments. An admirable ECE has often been described as respectful and reflective, practical, adaptive, and resourceful, fair, and just, patient, courageous, passionate, and persistent, among others.

Being a seasoned RECE most often also means taking on expanded roles and responsibilities. As part of my role and duties, I have had many opportunities for mentorship, from supporting enthusiastic recent graduates to career pivoters and worn-out educators hanging on their last lifeline. Along the way, I have also met knowledgeable educators with many strengths and talents. However, this enthusiasm quickly fizzles away for most, even swifter for some than the others. So, while the challenge of recruitment of the admirable ECE continues, I think the fundamental issue may just be of sustaining engagement and kindled enthusiasm of educators day after day and year after year in a strenuous yet rewarding field.

Numerous researchers have highlighted the connection between creativity and resilience. They are said to be complexly interlinked, with creativity being a powerful tool for developing and sustaining resilience. Creativity can help educators cope with stress and can provide the cognitive flexibility to reduce feelings of overwhelm and promote a sense of control in times of uncertainty (Fredrickson et al. 2001; Conner et al. 2017). So, how do we develop visionary and resilient educators that transform challenges into innovative opportunities and embrace a growth mindset?

- **By making Creativity a Daily Habit** – Educators don't want or need added responsibilities to their overloaded workloads, or to commit after work or volunteer hours to the creative cause. But what if creativity were a part of the educator's daily routine, and this could be achieved with some careful planning of schedules and roles. One of the simplest ways educators can foster creative ideas among each other is by having a "creative thoughts" journal that can be shared amongst classroom educators for brainstorming innovative curriculum approaches and unique learning experiences. Educators could also designate a creative space in the classroom where they model the use of and set aside a table or a shelf for unfinished projects. Some of you may be wondering how this is different from the art areas that we provide in our learning settings - and aren't ECE's supposed to routinely plan for a creative curriculum? Yet, creativity is more often sidelined in Early Childhood environments. The art areas that we create in the learning environments are exclusively tailored for the children, whereas a designated creative space, both indoors and outdoors, could act as a continuous reminder to educators for practicing daily creativity. This creative space would be regularly visited by both educators and children for collaborative, ongoing making and tinkering projects and replenished with new ideas and open-ended materials.

- **By Implementing Mechanisms of Continuous Feedback** – Creativity comes in different colours and shades, and what gets one educator out of bed and excited about going to work may not be the same for another. Educators could be asked about appealing project topics directly (through individual conversations and open-ended questions) or indirectly (through surveys and informal discussions during team meetings).

- **By creating Idea Hubs** – Educators who are passionate about creativity can lead, mentor, and support fellow educators by nurturing their curiosities, encouraging divergent thinking, and fostering a culture of collaboration within the centre. Centre Directors can support idea hubs by designating bi-weekly or monthly meeting times for educators during program hours. These idea hubs can also connect with educators from other centres through in-person visits, virtually, or shared blogs. The idea hubs could encourage educator participation in ongoing projects promoting parent and community engagement, sharing circles, show and tells and workshops for creative making and creating of unique program props and resources, along with others.

To foster increased initiative, leadership, and retention among educators, it is crucial to structure pay scales based on experience, qualifications, and additional duties or responsibilities.

- **By Implementing Wage Grids and Providing Compensation for Additional Educator Responsibilities** – Considering the relatively flat organizational structure of child-care centres, with very few paid advancement opportunities, leadership roles can awaken educator creativity and promote resilience. Educators seek leadership

roles for several compelling reasons, including personal and professional growth and the desire for greater influence and significant impact. However, considering the scope of ECE work, financial compensation for additional responsibilities and leadership roles can motivate most. In a field predominantly led by women who are socialized from a young age to be caregivers and problem solvers, saying "no" to additional unpaid responsibilities often triggers feelings of guilt, fear of being labelled as uncooperative, concerns about straining relationships, and pressure to prove one's value.

In today's world, marked by uncertainty, carving out time and space for daily creative joys is more crucial than ever.

From my experience, I have found that whether intentional or not, consistently saying "yes" can also lead to resentment and burnout among educators over time. To foster increased initiative, leadership, and retention among educators, it is crucial to structure pay scales based on experience, qualifications, and additional duties or responsibilities. Because saying "no" without guilt to unpaid and additional work is not a rejection of responsibility; rather, it is an essential strategy for setting some boundaries crucial for sustainable career growth, leadership, and personal fulfillment.

- **Centre Directors who promote creativity, leadership, and autonomy** –Effective Directors can foster a culture of trust by empowering educators to make decisions and take ownership of their work. This approach can be challenging for some Directors and Supervisors as it requires them to relinquish some control. Participative leadership, which involves employees in decision-making can result in a high-trust environment that encourages educators to take risks and initiative, communicate effectively, collaborate, and innovate (Wang et al. 2022). Directors can build trust by consistently gathering and acting on employee feedback, providing growth opportunities, and recognizing individual contributions.

In today's world, marked by uncertainty, carving out time and space for daily creative joys is more crucial than ever. By reframing thoughts, trying something new, sharing and connecting with others, Early Childhood Educators can replenish their creative reservoirs, rekindle passion and enthusiasm for this essential career and use adversity as a springboard to thrive and make meaningful impact on our children, families, and communities.

Ashmeet Parmar-Saroya is a RECE at Central Eglinton Children's Centre, bringing over 20 years of valuable experience in fostering, nurturing and engaging learning environments for young children. In addition to her work at the centre, Ashmeet also contributes to the academic community by teaching undergraduate courses in the Early Childhood Education program at George Brown College.

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Ghostbusters: Rupturing Ghosts of Developmentalism Through Living Stories

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Abstract

The ghosts of developmentalism haunt Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), perpetuating normative assumptions about children, learning, and teaching. In this paper, we trace the prevalence of developmentalism and propose a shift from *learning stories* to *living stories* in ECEC classrooms. We champion daily ruptures in classrooms and curricula to disrupt developmentalist scripts. Future educators can become "ghostbusters" of developmentalism, dismantling its grip on childhood and learning. As educators whose formative experiences were shaped by these scripts, we foreground scholars who question developmentalism from within lived and pedagogical tensions. Our argument is thus both a theoretical and personal reckoning with the structures that have long defined ECEC. In doing so, we examine how shifting post-secondary ECEC programs to foreground the transformative potential of daily ruptures embraces relationality, subjectivity, and superdiversity to challenge rigid, linear frameworks that marginalize diverse ways of knowing, being, and relating.

Key words

developmentalism, early childhood education and care, educators learning stories, superdiversity

Author Biographies

Dragana Mirkovic is a doctoral candidate and teaching assistant in the Faculty of Education at York University. Her research explores how children represent and engage with complex phenomena, such as spirituality, difficulty, and subjectivity in early childhood spaces. Grounded in psychoanalysis and a commitment to troubling dominant narratives of childhood and pedagogical practice, her work seeks to make visible the nuanced, often overlooked ways children make sense of the world.

Kamini Kamdar is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University. Her research examines how early childhood education spaces engage with equity, cultural diversity, and newcomer family experiences through pedagogical documentation and culturally responsive approaches. Grounded in a commitment to challenging systemic barriers in early years education, her work explores how curriculum and policy shape the experiences of educators, children, and superdiverse families in early learning environments. In addition to her doctoral research, she is also a practicing early childhood educator.

Ghostbusters: Rupturing Ghosts of Developmentalism Through Living Stories

In what we refer to as the "ghosts" of developmentalism, dominant narratives of childhood and education position children, educators, and families within a seamless, problem-free trajectory—one that erases the complexities of lived experience and the histories each individual carries into the early childhood classroom. These narratives, conceived by developmentalists creating curricula through imagined "norms," do not reflect reality, as no person, including the young children and educators for whom these curricula are designed, moves through education untouched by social, cultural, and personal disruptions or complexities. Yet, traditional Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) spaces and curricula continue to cast children and educators in static, predetermined, and predictable roles, sustained by the illusion that learning unfolds in a neutral, linear progression (Cannella, 1997). In fact, the Ontario's *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT) framework (2014), provides a "continuum of development" chart, which outlines developmental sequences across domains including social, emotional, language, cognitive, and physical, presenting learning as a progression from one expected behaviour to the next. For example, in the *Language and Literacy* domain, the continuum charts a child's development from "using verbal and non-verbal communication" to "conversing with peers and adults" (p. 42) in an undeviating fashion. These sequences construct a vision of childhood as unfolding in a linear, normative path where differences can be read as delays or deficits. The underlying assumption is that development occurs universally, overlooking the multiplicity, context, and variability of children's lives. As Lisa Farley (2018) reminds scholars, dominant discourses of childhood "masquerade as universal and natural" (p. 2), despite being constructed from studies involving a narrow selection of - often white and middle class - children. By privileging the developmental milestones of this group in the name of objective standardization, these discourses flatten the texture of subjectivity and collapse the experiences of children and educators into fixed roles and pathways that deny the intricate ways in which identity, power, and history shape teaching and learning. The persistence of developmentalism within post-secondary ECEC curricula reinforces the grip of these reductive narratives, limiting how educators and children can come to know themselves and others within educational spaces. Developmentalism not only flattens the personhood of children and educators, it also silences other ways of knowing, being, and relating, pathologizing that which does not fit into the confines of linear development (Farley, 2018). Yet, as Mariana Souto-Manning (2021) reminds us, the wounds opened by decades of developmentalism make room for something else to emerge. To break from developmentalism is to recognize education does not exist in a space of certainty, but in one where experience and learning remain subjective - fluid, relational, and intimately entangled with the diverse history, culture, and power each individual brings to the classroom.

In this article, we show how dominant discourses of ECEC impose false narratives of who children and educators should be, flattening the complexities of lived experience into a framework that assumes neutrality and universality. That said, many ECEC scholars do not shy away from complexity, contradiction, or discomfort and theorize from

within rather than *above* the daily tensions of practice. Their understanding of ECEC in daily moments and meanings creates openings for educators to think beyond developmentalism. In the complex and diverse histories that educators and children bring into the classroom, we begin to see the limits of developmentalism—not as a neutral body of knowledge, but as a discourse that erases what it cannot account for. Drawing on the notion of *learning stories*, we suggest that shifting from learning stories to *living stories* invites new ways for educators to encounter children and their families and foster the relations that bind them. Learning stories, an assessment framework used alongside Te Whāriki (New Zealand's early childhood education curriculum), positions assessment in early childhood education as relational, individual and contextual, reflecting children's unique learning dispositions and working theories (Carr, May & Podmore, 1998). The narrative framework of learning stories encourages the democratic participation of educators, children and families in children's learning experiences and offers a holistic alternative to traditional forms of assessment by recognizing the children's individual learning processes and working theories, reflecting creativity and unique ways of knowing, and including documentation strategies such as photographs, artifacts and narratives of the learning experience (Carr, May & Podmore, 1998). We, the authors, extend the idea of learning stories to *living stories* to reflect the lived and living - in real time - experiences of young children as a pathway to recognize the multiple and unique social, historical and cultural contexts of children and families. We position living stories as a new lens to understand relational encounters in classroom settings and beyond. While learning stories ask the question 'what learning is happening here, living stories explore 'who are we becoming together'. In these openings, the possibility of transformative relationality can be seen, and teaching and learning become more than the fulfillment of developmental aims. These are the moments that rupture, or bust, the trajectory of developmentalism, making space for pedagogies that are more ethical, responsive, and open to the uncertainty of subjectivity - ones that shift "curriculum as plan" to "curriculum as complicated" (Pinar, 1994, 2019).

It may be time for these dominant narratives to be declared outdated as the increasingly diverse and multilingual families, children, and educators who participate in Ontario's ECEC settings are recognized (Abawi, Berman, & Powell, 2019; Butler, 2021). To support this declaration, we consider the emergence of scholarship in ECEC related to the concept of *superdiversity* (Chan & Ritchie, 2016; Chan, 2020), a term coined by Steven Vertovec (2007) to describe the complexities of contemporary global migration patterns and their associated demographic complexities in settler societies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (CANZ). With scholars of superdiversity, we argue that ECEC now, more than ever, requires a shift from a static, Eurocentric view of child development to one that embraces the real, lived experiences of families and children who participate in ECEC settings. In order to recognize and build on the emergent conditions of superdiversity in CANZ societies, Paul Spoonley (2014) suggests that scholars and educators must fully come to terms with the many configurations of power differentials, rights, and policies afforded to those who "fit in" to recognized groups within settler societies. Superdiversity draws attention to new patterns of inequity and prejudices (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015; Chan & Ritchie, 2016), pointing out the necessity to examine and critique educational policies such as curricula in terms of how they respond to new global migration flows and to rethink pedagogies to address these complexities. It is through the rupture of developmentalism that new realities such as superdiverse populations of families, children, and educators emerge in place of the previous fixed Eurocentric views of teaching and learning.

As educators and scholars who have both lived and studied within the Ontario education system, our selection of literature emerges not only from academic engagement but also from our lived experiences as racialized, gendered individuals negotiating the tensions of developmentalist

curricula. We have intentionally curated this body of scholarship to foreground perspectives that disrupt dominant developmental paradigms and reflect the complexities of identity, culture, and relationality that shape everyday pedagogical encounters. In doing so, we aim to position our own subjective and situated knowledge not as supplementary but as central to reimagining what early childhood education can be.

Ghosts of Developmentalism: Dominant Narratives, Imaginary Children, and Real Wounds

By maintaining a framework that assumes neutrality and universality, developmentalism sanitizes what it means to be a child or an educator for the sake of the role each plays in traditional notions of education. That is, dominant developmental frameworks not only construct an idealized child (Berman & Abawi, 2019; Farley, 2018) - one that is white, middle-class, neurotypical, and able-bodied - but also position educators as passive facilitators of predetermined learning outcomes rather than co-constructors of knowledge in relationship with children (Delgado Vintimilla, 2014). For Farley (2018), nostalgic framings of childhood fabricate a more powerful position of adulthood while pathologizing entire communities through colonial hierarchies of humanity. These constructs of who children and educators ought to be define the purpose of education while rejecting experiences and complexities that threaten this very philosophy. In this way, developmental norms dictate what is considered *normal* for a child at a given age while pathologizing those who deviate from these expectations. These frameworks prioritize conformity to an imagined Eurocentric standard, erasing the differences that shape the lives of children and educators.

Such a construction of children and education is perpetuated through dominant discourses that frame childhood as a site of innocence, purity, and linear development, erasing histories of oppression and resistance that shape children's lives (Bernstein, 2011; Farley, 2018; Garlen, 2018). As Julie Garlen (2018) argues, discourses of innocence are not only universalized but racialized, tethered to whiteness and notions of racial purity. The innocent child - characterized as white, untainted, and deserving of protection - reinforces racial hierarchies by positioning innocence as a privilege extended to some but not all (Garlen, 2018; Bernstein, 2011). As such, dominant discourse continues to wound some groups of children and educators more than others, as the developmental theories of ECEC continue to uphold only histories of the white middle class. Thus, for Adam Davies, Maria Karmiris, and Rachel Berman (2022), the pervasive influence of developmentalism continues to privilege the narratives of some above others. As these thinkers argue, the dominance of traditional developmental theories, continue to shape post-secondary ECEC curricula, often marginalizing alternative perspectives and diverse ways of knowing. The perpetuation of this curriculum continues to shape the lives of children and educators alike. For example, Davies et al. (2022) describe how neurotypical, white, middle-class models of development are presented as the norm, while Indigenous, queer, disabled, or racialized experiences of childhood are treated as deviations or exceptions - if they are acknowledged at all.

Canadian scholarship regarding the experiences of newcomer and racialized families participating in ECEC settings point to barriers to accessing quality, regulated ECEC programs such as financial costs, spatial accessibility, and a lack of culturally responsive programming (Butler, 2021; Brown et. al, 2020). Financial barriers include the high costs of quality childcare, with many low-income families choosing unregulated childcare that may be of lower quality (Butler, 2021). Spatially, many low-income, racialized families often rely on public transportation or travel long distances to access childcare. In addition, spatial stigma, defined as the "negative portrayal of low-income areas by the media and in public discourse," compounds these challenges (Butler, 2021, p. 30). As many scholars recognize, cultural and racial norms reflected

by these barriers are often highly Eurocentric, and the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy that contradicts them makes it less likely that racialized and newcomer families see themselves represented in early years programs (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006; Butler, 2001; Awabi, Berman, & Powell, 2021).

The Challenge for Educators

Systemic barriers and assumed norms not only shape the experiences of racialized families in early childhood education, they also place educators in a difficult position, as what they experience and what they were taught in post-secondary training do not always align. As educators, we found ourselves entangled in this tension - torn between a desire to better serve the diverse and complex children and families in our classrooms and the rigid expectations that define what it means to be a "good" educator. Though Deborah Britzman's (2003) work does not focus on early childhood education, her analysis of the "good" educator emphasises the way educators are frequently defined by supervisory roles such as enforcing rules, assessing development, and managing classrooms. This tension is echoed in Rachel Langford's (2007) critical analysis of Ontario pre-service classrooms, where she explores how the "good" early childhood educator is often constructed as one who abandons deep cultural difference in favour of standardized developmental practices. Langford's work illustrates how professional identity is shaped through an implicit demand for conformity, silencing educators' cultural identities and histories in the name of developmental neutrality.

This prescriptive role, laden with assumptions about authority and control, produces a fundamental tension between who an educator is and who they must become for the sake of children's education. Cristina Delgado Vintimilla (2014) reflects on how early childhood educators are positioned as "facilitators of fun" (p. 83), a formulation that reduces pedagogy to management and children to consumers of experience. Dragana Mirkovic, Ellouise VanBerkel, and Lisa Farley (2023) extend this conversation, tracing the ways pre-service educators wrestle with the demands of their profession. Through focus group discussions, the authors explored how educators often experience their professional identity as a site of internal struggle, where they must uphold dominant discourses of childhood and development, even as they recognize how the imposition of developmentalist narratives wounds those who will never fit them. The expectation to conform to the developmentalist frameworks does not simply shape pedagogy; it inscribes itself onto the subjectivities of educators navigating a split between personal knowing and professional obligation.

Beyond Developmentalism

For us, these ghosts of developmentalism linger within educational structures, shaping spaces designed for children and educators who do not exist. These spectral figures of the imagined child and the ideal educator haunt the classroom, enforcing norms that fail to account for the complexities of the living stories of real children and teachers. The architecture of ECEC is built upon these ghosts, resulting in disciplinary frameworks, standardized assessments, and rigid developmental milestones that enforce conformity to these imagined ideals. Traditional post-secondary institutions perpetuate these ghosts by training future educators within frameworks that prioritize universality and neutrality over complexity and relationality.

As Berman and Zuhra Abawi (2019) highlight, the wounds made by developmentalist frameworks are clear on the children who do not fit the idealized notion of the child. Educators see the wounds in the child who is constantly pulled out of play for remediation, the one labeled 'behind' for not speaking English at home, or the child whose sensory sensitivities are framed as behavioural problems rather than invitations to rethink the environment. For these scholars, a paradigm shift to more Reconceptualist approaches is essential for reimagining the ideal of the child and disrupting the modernist notions of progressive development. Berman and Abawi note how Reconceptualist scholars have long challenged hegemony in ECEC,

arguing that dominant theories of child development privilege linear progress, universality, and neutrality while ignoring the ways in which children and educators shape and are shaped by the histories, politics, and power that are embedded in their lives. Reconceptualist scholarship uncovers the ways in which childhood has historically been defined not by stories of the child's own experience, but by adult anxieties, colonial legacies, and ideological investments in a particular kind of future (Berman & Abawi, 2019; Cannella, 1997; Farley, 2018). Educators can lead the Reconceptualist charge away from developmentalism, creating daily ruptures that challenge the dominant scripts of childhood and teaching. These daily ruptures emerge through small, everyday acts of resistance that surface in moments of uncertainty, contradiction, and relational encounter. This shift from learning stories to living stories can rupture the very fabric of what it means to be an educator.

Learning or Living Stories? Making Room for Relationality

The shift from learning stories to living stories holds special meaning for us as authors and educators as the insight was born from sharing the stories of our own wounds as newcomer immigrant young children to Canada. Being non-English speaking children in ECEC settings and required to participate in developmentally based ECEC curricula has forever shaped our views on identity, privilege, and belonging in early childhood education spaces. We recognize that identities cannot be freely chosen and to suggest otherwise is deeply problematic (May & Sleeter, 2010). Identity is shaped and constrained by an individual's positioning in society, which itself is a product of and associated with, a specific set of power relations. Here again, in children's identity creation in ECEC, we find the ghost of developmentalism haunting the already complex process of being human.

In his 1994 work, William F. Pinar used the notion of *currere* to grapple with the way subjectivities can challenge the idea of *curriculum as plan*. For Pinar, (1994, 2019) dominant narratives and prepackaged curricula obscure the subjective and transformative aspects of teaching, settling for scripted curriculum that limits meanings of teaching and learning. Instead, Pinar (2019) emphasizes the deeply subjective, lived, and often disorienting process of learning to teach. For this author, resisting "curriculum as plan" means embracing the uncertainties of teaching. An alternative, "curriculum as lived," allows for the possibility that both educators and children might be undone in ways that open new paths for meaning and relationality (Pinar, 1994, 2019). *Currere*, in this sense, is not merely a method but an ethical and pedagogical stance, an invitation to view curriculum as a complicated conversation where educators and students are entangled in the histories, stories, and social forces that shape their daily lives. In resisting "curriculum as plan," educators create openings for disruptions: those small but significant acts of refusal that challenge developmentalism's hold on early childhood education, making space for more relational, situated, and lived experiences of learning.

For Souto-Manning (2021), resistance manifests in interrogating how dominant discourses fail to account for lived realities, particularly as they pertain to pandemic and post-pandemic teaching and learning. Drawing on Arundhati Roy's concept of the pandemic as a portal, Souto-Manning argues that the global crisis exposed the fault lines of education as usual, making visible the ways in which returning to "normal" means re-inscribing systemic harm. She calls for transformative ruptures that do not restore stability but reimagine education altogether—ruptures that refuse the inevitability of dominant narratives and instead insist on more just and equitable futures. For my co-author and I, our pandemic work with learning stories - completed with families during and after the pandemic - highlighted shifts in education that opened up new meanings of what ECEC could be.

Taking our cue from Pinar (2019) and Souto-Manning (2021), we turn to the early childhood classroom not as a space of preordained outcomes but as a site of rupture, where learning is continually unsettled by the small, often unnoticed moments that refuse curricular certainty. These moments - an unexpected pause in

play, a child's gaze that lingers too long, a whispered word misunderstood - are unplanned, messy, and sometimes disorienting. They trouble our own and others' meanings of teaching and learning. Here, we find resonance with Mirkovic et al.'s (2023) concept of *micro-memories* - those fleeting, affectively charged moments that carry emotional and historical weight, traces of past experiences that resurface in the present. Rather than aligning with developmentalist frameworks that frame learning as a linear, neutral progression, *micro-memories* suggest that subjectivity in the classroom is shaped by past encounters, unresolved tensions, and deeply personal histories. They are moments that live on, sometimes subtly, shaping how children and educators come to know themselves and each other.

One such moment emerged through our engagement with learning stories during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as we navigated the layered uncertainties of teaching within a world abruptly reconfigured. In the small squares of our virtual classrooms, stories - both spoken and unspoken - spilled through the screens. Parents leaned in to offer a guiding hand, siblings drifted through the background, pets were hoisted into view for eager introductions. These seemingly minor interruptions lingered in our memories, becoming *micro-memories* that unsettled the boundaries between home and school, between teacher and learner, between presence and absence. In their ordinariness, these moments pulsed with affect and ambiguity, revealing the elasticity of our relationships and the porousness of the early childhood classroom. They offered a sense of *currere*, as the subjectivities of students, educators, and families flooded the screen, disrupting curriculum as plan (Pinar, 2019) and reminding us that the most powerful pedagogical encounters are often the least expected.

As we documented our students' experiences through learning stories, we simultaneously worked on a chapter tracing the ruptures and reconfigurations of pedagogy within the pandemic (Mirkovic & Kamdar, 2022). Giamminuti (2009) speaks of a "sense of we" (p. 29), a shared experience that, for us, took shape not despite distance but within it, both online and as in-person learning returned. Teaching became an act of movement to the shifting meanings of education - an ongoing practice of wondering with children and families, working with parents to craft learning stories, and navigating living as we all re-entered learning spaces already transformed.

In working with families to craft learning stories, we found ourselves documenting not just the trajectories of children's learning, but the deeply entangled living stories of educators, families, and children - narratives in motion, textured by history, disruption, and the quiet insistence of relation. Our work, which was virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, shifted power imbalances that documentation and assessment in the classroom often perpetuate. While educator's using documentation and learning stories usually determine what is being photographed and what learning goals are being demonstrated, living stories shifted us to family-led inquiries, where families and children took photos of their work and determined what learning they would photograph and send in to shape their stories. Suddenly, we had photos of a dog resting its head on a child's lap as they traced letters on a worksheet, family altars and artwork quietly visible in the background, or a parent capturing a child's block tower beside a shelf of family books. It was at this moment we realized we had been working with children and families to craft living stories, not just learning stories.

For us, the shift from learning stories to living stories signals a moment of rupture, one that rejects the idea of children as passive subjects of developmental assessment and instead situates them as active participants in meaning-making. While developmental approaches position personhood as beginning in the classroom, living stories allow us to embrace superdiversity and showcase how the histories of children and educators begin before and beyond the classroom and are always already entangled with the lives of families and communities. By choosing to see a child's experience as a living story, an educator resists developmentalist scripts and instead embraces relationality, subjectivity, and the complexities of becoming together. By acknowledging the lived and living stories of children, families, and educators, we "messy" the sanitized educational space with the shifting lives of those in the classroom.

That is, lived and living stories resist developmental scripts by refusing the notion that children and educators are fixed subjects progressing along predetermined trajectories. While developmentalism often flattens experience into stages and outcomes, living stories embrace the messy, relational, and deeply affective dimensions of education, allowing the histories of children, educators, and families to unfold in their own time and terms. In witnessing and documenting how the living stories of educators, families, and children intersect, educators do not simply observe learning, they participate in the ongoing negotiation of meaning, where subjectivities emerge in relation, rather than in isolation. Through this, education becomes not a script to follow, but a shared, evolving encounter with the complexities of being and becoming together.

This shift from learning stories to living stories finds resonance in Pinar's (1994, 2019) notion of *currere* as a lived, affective, and deeply subjective engagement with curriculum. If *currere* invites educators to see curriculum not as a predetermined script but as a complicated conversation shaped by personal and historical entanglements (Pinar, 2019), then living stories become a pedagogical gesture toward this relationality. As educators, we crafted living stories with children and families and found ourselves engaging in a kind of autobiographical reckoning - one that did not simply document learning but revealed the ways in which past, present, and future coalesce within the classroom. These stories, much like *currere*, became a way of attending to the subjective dimensions of teaching and learning. In this way, the shift to living stories does not simply mark a methodological change but signals a deeper commitment to ECEC as an ethical practice that resists closure, embraces complexity, and foregrounds the lived and living narratives that shape what it means to learn and to teach.

Embracing Micro-memories

This commitment to lived and living stories aligns closely with Mirkovic et al.'s (2023) concept of *micro-memories*. This notion reminds educators that the personal and professional are always already entangled, as fleeting yet affectively charged moments subtly disrupt dominant narratives of education in the everyday classroom. Just as *currere* and living stories foreground the ways in which histories, relationships, and subjectivities shape learning (Pinar, 2019), micro-memories reveal how experiences linger in the present, bursting through at any given moment and re-emerging in ways that complicate linear notions of development (Mirkovic et al., 2023). In our work with living stories, we came to see how micro-memories surfaced in the everyday exchanges among children, educators, and families - through the sudden recollection of a past lesson, the quiet hesitation before trying something new, or the way a child's story unexpectedly wove into an educator's own remembered experience. These moments were not monumental or consciously recognized, but they carried the weight of personal and collective histories, subtly shaping the trajectories of learning in ways that could not be accounted for in traditional, developmentalist frameworks.

By attending to these micro-memories, we saw how learning was not simply a process of moving forward but also of returning - to the past, to unresolved questions, and to affective traces that shape how children and educators engage with the world. This resonates with *currere*'s insistence that curriculum is not just about planning for the future but about reckoning with the past and present in ways that allow for new possibilities to emerge. In this sense, living stories can offer a rupture in the fabric of traditional education as they open to micro-memories and *currere*, converging as ways of resisting education as a linear, neutral process. Instead, an opening is revealed that offers ways to embrace the complexities of subjectivity that make learning deeply relational.

The Future of Post-Secondary ECEC Education: Toward Ethical and Situated Pedagogies

Despite Ontario's increasing demographic diversity, post-secondary ECEC programs still uphold dominant discourses of childhood and education that idealize particular notions of educators and children (Grieshaber & Blaise, 2019). These programs remain entrenched in Eurocentric developmental models

that privilege normative understandings of learning and behaviour while marginalizing alternative perspectives, such as newcomer, racialized, and/or Indigenous belief systems and ways of being (Grieshaber & Blaise, 2019). The persistence of these frameworks means that culturally and linguistically diverse ways of knowing and being are often positioned as deviations rather than valuable contributions. As Davies, Karmiris, and Berman (2022) argue, challenging the hegemony of developmentalism in ECEC requires critical engagement with alternative discourses that better reflect the complexity of children's (and educators) lived realities. By shifting away from rigid, prescriptive approaches to ECEC, post-secondary programs can instead create space for the multiplicity of experiences and challenges each family brings into the classroom.

The work of Kimberly Bezaire and Lisa Johnston (2022) extend this conversation by advocating for the centring of subjectivity in pre-service ECEC education. They argue that prevailing approaches to teacher preparation often "under-mind" (p. 436) educators, suppressing their cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and emotional realities in favor of a narrow, objective stance rooted in Eurocentric and developmentalist ideologies. This erasure of subjectivity not only disconnects educators from their own sense of self but also diminishes their intellectual and relational capacities, which are essential for meaningful engagement with children and families. Bezaire and Johnston create space for educators' personal narratives and critical reflections to shape pedagogical approaches and call for a shift in pre-service programs toward honoring this complexity and diversity. Their work resonates deeply with our call to rupture developmentalist legacies and re-imagine post-secondary ECEC education as a space where educators are not trained to replicate dominant discourses, but rather are invited to think, feel, and teach otherwise.

Superdiversity as a Framework

Turning to superdiversity as a framework for learning offers a way to view difference as an asset rather than a challenge in the everyday ECEC classroom. As Vertovec (2007) describes, superdiversity acknowledges the layered and intersecting identities that individuals bring into learning environments, moving beyond simplistic categorizations of diversity. In the context of post-secondary ECEC education, embracing superdiversity means recognizing that children and educators are embedded in complex social, cultural, and linguistic landscapes and communities that influence each other's ways of being in the world. By fostering an educational environment that actively incorporates these diverse perspectives, future educators can move beyond deficit-based approaches and instead see difference as a source of strength and innovation (Vertovec, 2007).

Fostering Everyday Ruptures

We believe one way to lean into more transformative education is by highlighting the small, everyday ruptures can be acts of resistance that open up space for future educators to contemplate the ethical nature of their work. For Souto-Manning (2021), resistance arises in interrogating how dominant discourses fail to account for lived realities, particularly as they pertain to pandemic and post-pandemic teaching and learning. In ECEC classrooms and post-secondary programs, such daily ruptures - like a shift from learning stories to living stories - are critical because they challenge deeply embedded inequities, allowing for pedagogies that honour diverse ways of knowing, being, and relating (Souto-Manning, 2021). Practice that emphasizes how daily ruptures can create the conditions necessary to move beyond standardized approaches that often erase cultural and communal knowledge and also redefine what it means to be children and educators. That is, in the rupturing, educators become the ghostbusters of the ghosts of developmentalism, intentionally opening space for new avenues for thinking, being, living, and becoming in ECEC.

Furthermore, post-secondary ECEC programs must recognize that children, families, and educators are all actively living and creating stories, all of which contribute to learning inside and outside of the classroom. Learning does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is a dynamic process. For this reason, curriculum in post-secondary ECEC programs should reflect the narratives of those engaged

in early learning settings to ensure that pedagogy is responsive to the realities of diverse communities (Vertovec, 2007), not simply tailored to idealized children and educators who do not exist.

For Susan Grieshaber and Mindy Blaise (2019), moving beyond developmentalism requires incorporating alternative perspectives such as post-structural, feminist, and postcolonial theories that challenge dominant assumptions about childhood and learning. This means creating curricula that honour multiple ways of knowing and being and integrating perspectives that move beyond the traditional confines of developmentalism. These perspectives make room for a more complex and inclusive approach to education, ensuring that early learning spaces reflect the richness of children's lived experiences rather than conforming to narrow developmental expectations. By doing so, post-secondary ECEC education can become a space where educators are not merely trained to replicate existing norms but are encouraged to think critically about their roles and responsibilities in fostering ethical and complicated early learning environments.

Ruptures in ECEC not only reshape practices within classrooms but also have profound implications for post-secondary ECEC education, fundamentally altering how future educators are trained and how knowledge is constructed within the field (Davies, 2022). In post-secondary ECEC education, the ruptures Reconceptualist thinking offers can challenge traditional frameworks that prioritize Eurocentric developmental models, standardized assessment, and rigid pedagogical approaches instead of making space for more justice-oriented, community-driven, and relational ways of teaching and learning (Davies, 2022; Davies, Karmiris, & Berman, 2022). The increasing diversity in Ontario classrooms makes this shift especially critical; Eurocentric approaches are no longer (and never were) enough. By centering the lived experiences of children, families, and educators, particularly those who have been marginalized historically, these disruptions push ECEC programs to interrogate whose knowledge is valued, whose voices shape curricula, and how future educators are prepared to engage with diverse communities. For us, this is not only a theoretical imperative but a personal one. The scholars and stories we centre throughout this paper are those that have helped us name our own experiences, affirm our questions, and imagine pedagogical alternatives rooted in ethical relation rather than compliance. Thus, instead of perpetuating the ghosts of developmentalism, post-secondary ECEC programs can be spaces to think together about how intentional, daily decisions that embrace the messy, unfinished work of education itself allow educators to be ghostbusters.

Conclusion: Ghostbusters!

In making the shift from learning stories to living stories, we find ourselves confronting the ghosts of developmentalism, those persistent spectres that haunt ECEC with their demands for universality, predictability, and idealized notions of an educator and child that do not, and cannot, exist (Berman & Abawi, 2019; Davies, Karmiris, & Berman, 2022: Langford, 2007). Yet, in the everyday ruptures and micro-memories of the classroom, we catch glimpses of other possibilities, openings where the static roles of children and educators give way to dynamic, unfolding subjectivities. To engage with these ruptures is to resist the haunting scripts of developmentalism, to refuse the sanitized narratives that insist on preordained trajectories. Instead, living stories invite us to linger in uncertainty and to witness and honour the histories, struggles, and complexities that children, educators, and families bring into educational spaces every day. In doing so, educators take up an active role, not as passive observers of learning, but as co-constructors of meaning, as participants in a relational, unfolding process of being and becoming together. So, in facing the ghosts that linger in ECEC, educators do not turn away. Instead, we take up the challenge of confronting them, dismantling their grip on how childhood and education are imagined. By crafting living stories, we have the potential to reclaim the space for subjectivity, complexity, and relationality, forging new pedagogical possibilities that disrupt the dominance of developmentalism. In the words of a famous team of ghost hunters: When it comes to the ghosts of developmentalism - who you gonna call?

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