

# Federal budget 2021: 7 actions to ensure Canada's 'child-care plan' is about education <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

The 2021 federal budget promises new investments of up to \$30 billion over five years and \$8.3 billion per year after that to create a Canada-wide early learning and child-care plan.

Funds committed by Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland could create a made-in-Canada early childhood education system comparable to those offered by non-English speaking G7 countries. The federal government says it will work with provincial, territorial and Indigenous partners.

As Canadian researchers with more than two decades of teaching and researching early childhood education, we believe it is critical for people in Canada to know and understand what is possible in early childhood education beyond the provision of safe and affordable care for children while adults work.

### Children as participants

We are part of an Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory: We bring together collaborative research in a virtual "laboratory" dedicated to researching early childhood curriculum. We are a cross-Canada network interested in supporting children and educators as active participants facing the political, economic and social complexities of contemporary Canada.

As legislators, advocates, educators and families come together to make decisions about the details of the 2021 federal budget, we do not want to miss the opportunity to create a system that ensures early childhood education is indeed about education.

If governments see early childhood education as a service for working parents, they miss out on understanding the rich educational experiences in children's lives that also shape our collective future.

If we are serious about creating a national system that acknowledges child care for the educational project it is, more is required than mere replication of service-based models.

Our early childhood collaboratory advances the following seven actions as vital for envisioning a national program. We believe these actions provide people across Canada with a framework to imagine vibrant educational and inclusive spaces that young children deserve.

**Action 1:** Create provincial curriculum frameworks to provide a vision for early childhood education that responds to 21st-century challenges. Early childhood curriculum frameworks need to prioritize education as an undertaking far more complex than simply socializing young children. Such frameworks focus on supporting children to be creative thinkers, able to create more liveable worlds for all.

**Action 2:** Advocate for better wages for early childhood educators and provide them with opportunities to earn university degrees. Early childhood educators should receive compensation that allows them to sustain their critical role in early education.

Educators are inventive, dedicated and intellectually rich people. Systematic research consistently points to the correlation between educational requirements and working conditions of educators. When early childhood educators hold (at a minimum) a bachelor's degree and have the opportunity to participate in meaningful professional learning, they are more likely to prioritize educational practices in early childhood centres.

**Action 3:** Urge early childhood education centres commit to particular educational values. Values define the purposes and processes that orient educational decisions. Alongside a provincial curriculum framework, values guide educators and children as they respond to specific local challenges.

**Action 4:** Consider how educational values link the early childhood education centre to broader issues and concerns. In today's complex

world many educators are concerned about our environmental crisis and global inequities, and are committed to educating for future survival. Values for early childhood education should be locally generated and grounded in community knowledges. They should respond to current global injustices including food insecurity, inclusion, ongoing colonization, systemic racism poverty, climate change and pandemics.

**Action 5:** Consider how values can be enacted through curriculum processes carefully created to sustain inquiry, thinking and collective learning. To create an early childhood system that takes seriously children’s ideas, experiences and relationships, the curriculum cannot be composed of unrelated activities designed to merely entertain children. Together, families, educators and children create curriculum that emphasizes relationships and spaces of collective investigation, where educators and children are in dialogue with each other and with the world.

**Action 6:** Encourage educators to engage in the practice of what early childhood researchers and educators call “pedagogical documentation” to co-create curriculum with children. Through this practice, educators consider their everyday work with children, and propose engagements that further their shared questions, ideas and experiences. It is also a practice of collective memory that makes educational processes visible, inviting families to engage with ideas, questions and concerns pertaining to education for young children. It can also feed into larger research processes, and invite the broader public to have a deeper understanding of early childhood education.

**Action 7:** Create the conditions for educators to closely work with pedagogists. Pedagogists are professionals who support early childhood educators; their work is inspired by the Italian “pedagogista” tradition in the Reggio Emilia style of education. These professionals don’t follow a doctrine or a pre-determined practice, but they are immersed in early childhood education programs and work alongside educators to support curriculum. Unlike early childhood educators, they do not work directly with children.

This is a new role in Canada that scholars in our collective have been involved in creating with the Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia. The role is rooted in and related to similar roles seen in early childhood education in other countries like Italy, Belgium and Sweden.

Across the country, pedagogists now serve some Indigenous communities in B.C. through the First Nations Pedagogies Network. Groups of educators in B.C. and Ontario are also working alongside a pedagogists. However, the role of the pedagogist can be part of a new Canadian early education system that strives for equitable curriculum that is locally meaningful.

Early childhood education holds enormous potential as a conduit for transformative social, cultural and political change. Realizing this potential requires provincial governments to fund and sustain a public system similar to the one already in place for school-age children.

Canada has an opportunity to become a world leader in early childhood education. With monumental federal support, this is the time to build a sustainable and relevant early education system responsive to the concerns of the 21st century.

*These ideas were generated by the members of the Early Childhood Pedagogies Collaboratory.*

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** federal budget <sup>[4]</sup>

curriculum and pedagogy <sup>[5]</sup>

professionalization <sup>[6]</sup>

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**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/21/04/federal-budget-2021-7-actions-ensure-canada%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98child-care-plan%E2%80%99> [2] <https://theconversation.com/federal-budget-2021-7-actions-to-ensure-canadas-child-care-plan-is-about-education-159191> [3]

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