

The here and now: Reimagining early childhoods in urgent times

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ISSUE 2: Engaging with theme #2 of BC Childcare Plan: Educators' obligations and responsibilities towards difference and diversity

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Engaging with Theme #2 of BC Childcare Plan: Educators' Obligations and Responsibilities Towards Difference and Diversity

On December 1, 2021 Ministers Chen and Whiteside announced that the BC Government is seeking input from a broad range of child care partners as a next step in shaping the future of early childhood education in British Columbia. Five themes were highlighted to guide the consultation process, including "making child care culturally safe and inclusive of all children"(Theme #2).

While terms like 'cultural safety and inclusion' risk becoming buzzwords, attending to them requires understanding that they represent a complex range of intersecting factors contributing to the exclusion of BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, impoverished and other marginalized groups of children and families (and educators). As we have stated previously, children in the 21st century are inheriting complex and at times challenging worlds.

With the intention of contributing to the ongoing consultation process, the ECPN calls on others in the field to think about this crucial theme in relation to the education of early childhood educators. We propose that 'how to make early learning and care more inclusive and culturally safe for all children' needs to begin with the following questions:

- Who is the early childhood educator expected to be in their work supporting BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, impoverished and other marginalized children and families?
- How are we supporting educators to respectfully engage with these groups?
- How are we promoting approaches to everyday practices that complexify superficial (status quo) understandings of inclusion in early childhood education communities?
- Are we doing enough to support educators to reconsider the way inclusion lives (or fails) in everyday practice?
- What competencies and ongoing professional opportunities do we envision to support educators in the complex ongoing process of creating 'culturally safe and inclusive' spaces?

Considering these questions helps us think more critically about the systemic exclusions preventing children and their families from fully participating in the first place. Creating spaces where differently situated children and families are welcomed requires educators to enact practices that focus on more than simply keeping children (emotionally & physically) 'safe and happy' while their parents engage in the workforce or study.

To this point, the BC Early Learning Framework asks educators to create a curriculum that considers children's well-being and belonging, grounded in a vision of "respectfully living and learning together." This call obliges educators to take responsibility for creating 'culturally safe and inclusive' pedagogical spaces. Of course, this also involves wages for educators that are commensurate with the education levels required to promote deeper understandings of the transformative potential of early childhood education.

Region: British Columbia [3]

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