

The here and now: Reimagining early childhoods in urgent times

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ISSUE 4: Moving beyond readiness: What is possible when early childhood education is a project of today

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Excerpted from newsletter:

On February 18, 2022, the Honourable Minister of Education, Jennifer Whiteside announced that the Government is investing \$125,000 to expand the Just Be Four (Just B4) early childhood education program. The Just B4 programs are licensed half-day early years programs for children entering kindergarten the following year. The introduction of more publicly funded early childhood spaces that will operate in conjunction with the Strong Start programs is welcome news as the province continues to develop a publicly funded child care system. However, with the introduction of this and each initiative, we have an opportunity to ask critical questions regarding the values that shape early childhood education policy. At first glance we could read the JustB4 programs as a school readiness initiative. Digging deeper into its intention, however we find out, that its unique title gestures towards the image of the child outlined in the Photo credit Sylvia Kind, Atelierista BC Early Learning Framework (BC ELF). The BC ELF holds an image of children as capable, with individual strengths and grounded in their unique, social, linguistic and cultural heritage. Children are seen as active participants their world, already learning and creating new understandings in their relationships with others. This image envisions early childhood education as spaces where children and adults come together to co-construct curriculum together as they respond to the complexities and challenges of living.

A misunderstanding of the title of this new initiative invites us to remember that it would be a missed opportunity to reduce early childhood education to simply a project of readiness implying that children are incomplete and their value is measured by their future contributions to society. It is imperative that we attend to the possible dangers of an early childhood system that is primarily concerned with assimilating children into a universal standard void of difference and diversity. It is the ECPN's hope that by dethroning the discourse of readiness, we can open up new possibilities for developing early years programs and social policies that allow today's children the spaces to learn to live well together in conditions yet unknown.

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