
Re-searching Early Childhood Pedagogies: A Blog Co-composed by VIU ECEC Students, Faculty, and Community Members

Antje Bitterberg and Cheryl Cameron

We share a deep commitment to re-imagining early childhood education and care (ECEC) and engaging with/in pedagogical contexts together. What follows is our story of the creation of the Vancouver Island University (VIU) ECEC blog *Re-searching Early Childhood Pedagogies*. This blog was conceived in the intersections of our work as instructors, practicum coordinators, and Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) faculty pedagogists in the ECEC department at VIU. We offer a brief overview of the connections that drew us into co-composing the blog and highlight the ways it has become a place to dialogue and enliven pedagogical complexities. As a collective space to re-think and

re-search ECEC, the blog weaves together partial, incomplete local stories shared by students, educators, instructors, and community members. This article is an invitation to think with us about the process of co-composing and what this process asks of us within ECEC. We share our story with deep appreciation for our colleagues and the profoundly generative encounters we share on, and beyond, the blog.

Intersecting Paths: Finding Our Way

In May 2017 we were gathering on the traditional and ancestral territories of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam Nations, where Capilano University held graduating presentations for their Early Childhood Care and Educa-

tion program. At this time, Antje was attending the graduation as faculty and Cheryl was presenting as a student. In conversation we discovered that, within a matter of months, we would both be living on Vancouver Island. Since then, we have been fortunate to continue our relationship as colleagues in the VIU ECEC team, and as ECPN faculty pedagogists. We remain grateful for our entangled lives and echo Mindy Blaise's (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020) advice, "You need to find your people, and you need to find your people quick" (0:19:00). This compels us to create conditions for connection among educators.

Our VIU ECEC students are dispersed over three campuses, on the lands of the Quw'utsun, the Tla'amin, and Snuneymuxw First Nations. VIU's ECEC faculty has shared many conversations and engaged with communities in events that have cultivated connections between the ECEC program, students, and community educators in meaningful ways. Shortly after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, and the shift to working virtually, a small group of us gathered on Zoom for an ECEC mentor feedback forum. There was an expressed desire from mentor teachers to have opportunities to engage more intimately with the ideas, course content, and ma-



The Vancouver Island University ECEC Blog: *Re-Searching Early Childhood Pedagogies* is at <https://wordpress.viu.ca/ecec/>

terials students were learning with, including the revised Early Learning Framework (ELF) (Government of BC, 2019). Parallel to our conversations with mentors, ECEC faculty revisited ideas about developing an online space to connect students across our campuses, leading to the creation of an ECEC student hub site on VIU's learning platform to welcome new and returning students in September 2020. Listening closely to students, mentors, and colleagues, Antje and Cheryl began to imagine a collective virtual space that could hold all of us: students, educators, mentor teachers, faculty, and community members. A guiding question re-emerged for us: How might we create a space where we could come together to think, to listen, and to wonder across communities? Through the process of writing this article, another reflective question emerged: How could a global pandemic be a catalyst for the inception of a platform beyond the physical classroom for re-telling stories, re-thinking what we thought, and re-considering interpretations that situate or disorient?

Within, and evolving out of this context, the VIU ECEC blog was launched in November of 2020. Since then, a lively blog culture has emerged with contributions that invite and experiment with complexity and move beyond a submission posted, praised, and forgotten. What follows are some initial findings.

Collective Perspectives Beyond Individualism in ECEC

Since launching the VIU ECEC blog, we commit to making the time to practice ways of working with others and listening closely to the stories in front of us. In meeting students and community members in particular

times and contexts, we look to walk together with the intention of thinking deeply. Sharing what you have created, and welcoming questions about your ideas, is a courageous act. Our process of working together has varied for everyone and has often included several movements as submissions were passed back and forth. Foundational to our process is a relational practice where we take time to write, wonder, compose, and create together. We have learned that working with the contributors and reading our stories has been exhilarating. Kate Boyd from the Henderson Elementary StrongStart in Powell River echoes this sentiment in her reflection about the blog:

This has been a time of isolation in many regards, so the opportunity to connect with colleagues, students, VIU staff, and others has been a valued connection. To read about the things that others are wondering renews why I went into ECE. It helps to give inspiration to what we can plan for now and in the future in our programs" (personal communication, January 20, 2021).

Co-created, the blog space invites us to find out more about what connects us within our early childhood practices. How can we practice in a way that views all beings as interconnected and dependent on each other (Government of BC, 2019)? How might the world embrace us and what could be activated in our ways of holding our histories, cultures, and natures? Dr. Affrica Taylor (2020) reminds us that children's worlds are entangled within nature and culture. These entanglements are messy and include "inheritances, imperfections, tensions, problems

and legacies" (3:26). Drawn into a bigger story beyond ourselves, we begin to ask what stories and ideas can be generated here? What worlds (Haraway, 2016) might we inhabit by recognizing and attending to personal histories as situated within wider (more-than-personal) contexts?

Inviting a Culture of Research

Antje and Cheryl wonder about the distinct nature of research in ECEC and its qualitative nature concerned with relationships. The submissions offered are traces of research and sources for meaningful and continued dialogue about early childhood pedagogies. The blog is a site of research. The ELF suggests that "educators are researchers and collaborators" (Government of BC, 2019, p. 15) and "foster a curiosity that leads them to seek ways to extend not only children's learning but also their own" (p. 18). A disposition of curiosity is integral to our lives as educators-researchers, and it is this curiosity that we hope to nourish in our collective inquiries. Stories can be told through multiple modes of texts and images. How might paying close attention to children's inventions and engagements become research? How might children's drawings and narratives become sites for our deep consideration? How does offering this kind of attention place educators in the role of researchers alongside children? If not for the social influence of others, we wonder how research ideas might otherwise travel and be shared. We are borrowers of ideas, re-inventors who are part of a social culture that generate new innovation from what has come before (Laroche, 2015). What would it mean to continue to ask, what might be beyond, what is

waiting to be uncovered, reframed, or invited anew? How might we open up to new or uncomfortable points of view (Rinaldi, 2003)?

Embracing Complexity

We want to provoke, dig, and question, to practice ways of critically engaging in conversations. Finding the entry point to complexity has no clear or easy path. Yet, we are offered stories from students, educators, community members, and instructors that invite us to respond to and linger with ideas. How might we engage with stories that invite multiple perspectives within early childhood and beyond? What are the ways we could think together with expansion and wonder, rather than with deletion or omission? In refusing simplicity and comfort, we actively seek ways of learning and knowing about the world beyond what is familiar. Thomas King (2010) suggests that Western society has a tendency to rely on dichotomies and is “distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas” (p. 25). This invites us to consider ways we might move toward complexity that can be mysterious and puzzling. Particular early childhood practices are valued within the context of a community. Does this mean that it could or should be valued equally in another context? How might ideas be held and valued without placing them in dichotomous categories, such as boy/girl, black/white, other/same?

We commit to paying attention to the tensions. The blog has become a space to share our pedagogical responsibilities through the experience of reading and thinking together. Our growing blog community has explored pedagogies of place, concepts of beauty, acts of no-

tice, with invitations for interpretation. Ideas are unfinished, uncertain, and ungraspable. We engage with the implications of binary thinking with questions from Glenda MacNaughton (2005, p. 118): “How does binary thinking enter your everyday discussions in early childhood studies?” “What is silenced or othered through the hierarchical thinking in these binaries?”

The following are blog post responses that open possibilities for further dialogue:

Gender is also a good example of unhelpful binary thinking, in that in many people’s eyes, a child is either a boy or a girl, but this does not accurately reflect reality, as some children are intersex, and some children have the body of a boy but the mind of a girl, or vice versa. Relying on the binary here may exclude and marginalize those children who are often in the greatest need of understanding and care. (Wood, 2021)

As I read and reflected on this reading and question: “How does binary thinking enter your everyday discussions in early childhood studies?” I have become aware that my brain and thoughts tend to navigate to the “binary thinking” mode. I relate this type of thinking as “a pair always has two. One part of the pair is always the opposite of the other part (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 62). This thinking approach is a very black and white approach. But binary thinking can be an important strategy, especially when it comes to decisiveness. (Gillmore, 2021)

Co-Creating the Path Unknown

We envision the VIU ECEC blog as incomplete and always becoming. How might we revisit what has been offered as part of the whole? What theories and stories are unexpected and what might be gained/rejected by living in a state of becoming? We think with educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) to envision the blog as in-the-making:

In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying, and the like... it ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group’s becoming. (p. 39)

Thinking with Greene, and the contributions on the blog, we wonder what might become possible if we think of ECEC as being in-the-making? What is possible when we let go of control, when we allow ourselves to be affected by another without prescribed outcomes? What is required of us?

We co-compose the VIU ECEC blog in our entangled roles as instructor, practicum coordinator, and ECPN faculty pedagogists (see <https://www.ecpn.ca/>). With deep gratitude for our collaborative work as ECPN pedagogists and the generative aspects of our roles alongside VIU’s ECEC faculty, we share a quote by Moss (2014) to describe the trust that has been gifted to us in our roles. In the telling of alternate stories of ECEC, Moss offers a re-imagined understanding of the term *investment beyond calculable and profitable*: “This is investment

as part of a relationship of hope, obligation, and incalculable hospitality, not a relationship of calculable exchange. This is investment in potentiality, in that which cannot be known in advance” (p. 78). We are gifted with the opportunity to learn alongside VIU ECEC students, mentors, and colleagues. We are supported in many ways by this uncertain work. The blog contributors entrust their thoughts and creativity with us, and we endeavour to honour, and be made worthy of, the trust bestowed in our privileged positions. We hope this might inspire you to begin, or continue to make, your bigger stories visible and open to dialogue in a public space.

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Both Antje Bitterberg and Cheryl Cameron are settlers on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, particularly on the territories of the Snuneymuxw First Nation and the Quw'utsun Tribes. Cheryl and Antje are graduates from Capilano University's Bachelor of Early Childhood Care and Education. They are colleagues at Vancouver Island University where they have extended their roles to include working as ECPN faculty pedagogists. They are honoured co-recipients of VIU's Provost's Award for Scholarship, Research, and Creative Activity 2020 and co-composers of the VIU ECEC Blog: <https://wordpress.viu.ca/eccec/>

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seeds of conversations rooted in the hearts and minds of community to invigorate our continued practice.

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Nicky Byres has served as the executive director of the Society of Richmond Children's Centres for 20 years. Jacqueline Ewonus is the program director at SFU Child-care, working with 70 educators in 17 programs for children 0 to 12 years. Lisa Nicholson, is the program coordinator and instructor for the ECE program with Delta School District, Continuing Education. Jennifer Vanderberg has worked in a variety of roles supporting children, families, and educators for over 30 years. She is an instructor of ECE and coordinator of student practica for Delta School District, Continuing Education.

We reverently acknowledge the ancestral, traditional and unceded Aboriginal territories of the Coast Salish First Nations where we work, live, play, and learn. We share our respects to the Elders; we honour with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it and commit ourselves to the journey of reconciliation in our country.