



PEDAGOGY OF Care



CONFERENCE FOR EARLY LEARNING PROFESSIONALS

WE WELCOME EACH CHILD AS A WHOLE CAPABLE PERSON

YOU ARE... EXTRAORDINARY



GENUINE CARE RESPECT

GREET A CHILD WITH A SMILE & NURTURE HER SELF WORTH

A STRENGTH THAT WILL CARRY THEM THROUGHOUT LIFE

WE ARE SO FORTUNATE TO HAVE CHOSEN TO WORK WITH CHILDREN

WE CONNECT WITH THE BEST OF HUMANITY

WE ARE CHANGE MAKERS... VISIONARIES WORLD BUILDERS...

the DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE - TRULY MATTERS!



Thank you to Kathryn Maxfield of Green Marker Studios for capturing so much of our conference through her visual note-taking illustrations!

Spaces That Ground Us: REIMAGINING OUR ENVIRONMENTS

The Collective Vision: Something beautiful emerged in what people want to try: a wholesale reimagining of early childhood environments.

People wrote about wanting to create "cozy corners in every location," making classrooms "more green/forest-like," using "less light in the room," making spaces "feel more grounded and less industrial." There were plans made for rocking chairs, creating calming corners and provocations in wagons, incorporating family photos on toys, and even "a dog bed that everyone can use!"

This isn't about aesthetics for aesthetics' sake. It's about understanding that our environments shape nervous systems, invite or inhibit certain kinds of play, and communicate what we value. The space itself becomes a teacher, a co-regulator, an invitation.

Walk into your space as if for the first time. What does it communicate about what matters here?

If children could redesign your space, what do you imagine they would change?

What's one element you could soften, naturalize, or make more responsive to children's (and your own) nervous system this week?

Want to learn more about classroom design? Early Childhood Investigations has a recorded webinar called "Designing Engaging Early Childhood Environments Using Principals of ECE Program Pedagogical Approaches". Check it out!

Neurological research shows that natural elements (wood, plants, natural light) and curves (rather than sharp angles) activate the parasympathetic nervous system—our rest-and-digest response. The bright primary colours and fluorescent lighting common in early childhood spaces can actually increase cortisol levels in both children and adults.



BODIES, BRAINS, AND THE COURAGE OF RISKY PLAY

Dr. Mariana Brussoni's research on risky play shows that children who engage in risky outdoor play have better risk assessment skills, greater physical competence, and improved mental health outcomes—yet injury rates in "safer" playgrounds have remained largely unchanged over decades of increased safety regulations.

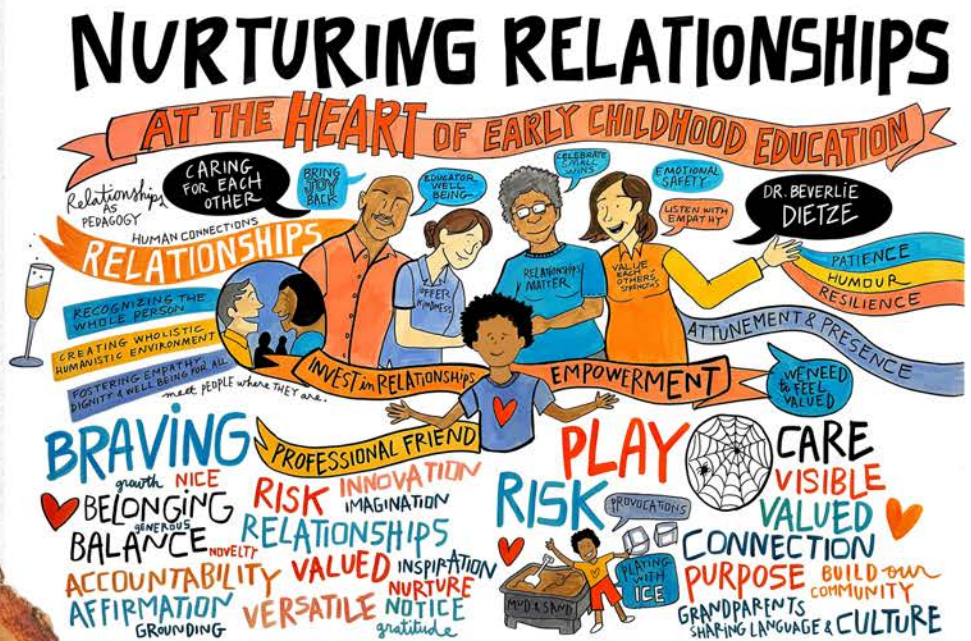
The Tension: A strong current ran through the reflections you shared about understanding child development more deeply—particularly toddler brains, play schemas, and the distinction between chronological versus developmental age. People are hungry to understand why children do what they do. But knowledge alone isn't enough. Someone named a real tension: "How to get colleagues to embrace risky play and stop providing reasons why they can't." Another wondered: "How do we get directors to understand and support risky play in general ECE knowledge?"

We understand children's developmental need for challenge, autonomy, and yes—risk. We know toddlers need "more gross motor/physical activity." We know one person who is taking away the importance of "meeting children where they're at." But we're working within systems that sometimes prioritize some aspects of safety over what we know about children's development and wellbeing.

What "reasons why we can't" have you heard (or said) about risky play—and what's the fear underneath each reason?

How might you document children's competence during risky play in ways that help others see capability rather than danger?

The Canadian Child Care Federation has a whole series on Outdoor Play, including a webinar specifically about Risky Play!



What's one small risk you could support this week, and what support would you need to feel confident doing so?

The Weight of Truth and ReconciliACTION

The Reckoning: In reflection, one person wrote simply: "The realization of what happened in the Residential School System." Others expressed curiosity about "Indigenous ways of life," about "furthering reconciliation within our programs," about whether "a regular person can write a Land Acknowledgement or does an Indigenous person or Elder have to do it?"

Someone wants to "incorporate the Medicine Wheel teachings in program." Another wants "to create a nature ceremony to share with the children to make it matter and have meaning for them."

The honesty is moving—people naming what they don't know, asking questions that feel vulnerable to ask. But **reconciliation isn't a curriculum add-on or a land acknowledgement** we recite. As someone wrote about their takeaway: **we need to learn "how to connect children to Mother Earth."** This is about relationship—to land, to Indigenous people and communities, to truth, to a fundamentally different way of understanding our place in the world.

RECONCILIATION with Purpose



How is learning about Residential Schools and ongoing colonization changing your actual practice, your pedagogy, your understanding of power?

What does it mean to "connect children to Mother Earth" in a way that honours Indigenous knowledge systems?

If reconciliation requires truth first, what truths are you sitting with about this land, this history, and your place in it?

Begin your Anishinaabe language learning through a free, online, self-paced course. Email muskokahaliburton@contactnorth.ca to find out more!

The Métis Nation of Ontario has a fabulous newsletter for ECEs called "The Tiny Tribune". Here are some examples from their most recent issue about incorporating small-world play into cultural ideas. Sign up for more great ideas by emailing ELCCsupport@metisnation.org for more great ideas!

November 16th is Louis Riel Day! How might you honour this day?

The last residential school in Canada closed in 1996. This means the youngest survivors are in their early 30s. The impacts of this system—which was explicitly designed to "kill the Indian in the child"—ripple through generations. Many of the children and families in our programs carry this history in their bodies, their relationships, their communities.

