



## The Role of the Early Childhood Educator in British Columbia

[Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia \(ECEBC\)](#) acknowledges that our offices are on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selílwith (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. We thank them for having cared for this land. ECEBC members are in relationship with many Nations throughout the province and we look forward to continuing to work and learn from the Indigenous people and communities of British Columbia (BC).

### Introduction:

ECEBC exists to support early childhood educators in informing the broader community about our work. Since 1969 we have been dedicated to building respect for and understanding of early childhood education and educators. We provide a collective voice to advance professional and personal commitment to the value of early care and learning by empowering the sector through education, collaboration, advocacy, and leadership. To that end, ECEBC creates Position Papers that provide members and the general public with information about issues related to early childhood educators. This paper is meant to be aspirational, thought-provoking and dynamic in nature. ECEBC articulates positions that can sometimes be controversial; however, these positions will always be consistent with the organization's mission and vision. We welcome your feedback.

This position paper is a **visionary document** that disrupts and reinvents the traditional language of early childhood education. In doing so, it is intended to shift dominant narratives of early education and inspire thoughtful dialogues with early childhood educators about the lively potentialities of their evolving role. Therefore, the views in this paper are in accordance with and expand the vision, principles, and pathways to learning outlined in the [BC Early Learning Framework](#) (2019), the commitments to a culturally rooted vision of learning in the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#) (2018), as well as the ethical principles of the [ECEBC Code of Ethics](#) (2021). We are inspired by the [research and pedagogical practices](#) that are transforming our field and we embrace our ethical obligation to make visible and public the multifaceted work and role of the early childhood educator. This role is one that has and will continually shift, transform, and respond to an ever-changing world.

This position paper is the second installment in a series of statements that ECEBC has published in response to governments' intention and investment in the creation of a national public Early Childhood Education (ECE) system. This second paper describes and envisions the role of early childhood educators in BC. It is inspired by the Early Childhood Pedagogy Collaboratory's [Conditions for Moving Beyond "Quality in Canadian Early Childhood Education: An Occasional Paper"](#). More specifically it expands on Action #5 (the legislation of the Early Childhood Educator Act, 2021) outlined in the first position paper, [Integrating the Early Childhood Education Professional and Programs into the Ministry of Education: Position Paper](#).

### **Background:**

ECE in Canada is commonly perceived as a service for working parents, rather than "a public good, of great social, cultural and political importance" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.29). When early childhood education is understood and operated as a commodity to be purchased by consumers in a competitive market, ECE is reduced to an economic transaction without consideration of educational values and purpose. From this perspective, early childhood educators are viewed as technicians who apply skills and/or predetermined developmental knowledge to provide a service to keep children safe and healthy within a model of cost efficiency and minimum universal standards. These narratives maintain the colonial role of the educator as the maternal, feminine, docile subject with the goal of civilizing uncivilized bodies (Meiners, 2002). Current research asserts social policies and narratives maintain our profession as gendered, racialized, marginalized and positioned as a secondary market force. However, we know that early childhood educators are not limited by these narratives and images.

Educators are leaders and hopeful for a better future, without knowing the shape of that future. Educators are emboldened to disrupt the legacies of the past in order to activate transformative change for the future. In relationship with children, families, communities, materials and places, educators engage in intentional pedagogical work in response to the complexity of our current conditions. Early childhood education is a space to co-create new worlds with alternative narratives.

### **ECEBC's Vision of the Early Childhood Educator**

This position paper joins the vision of the Early Childhood Pedagogy Collaboratory that sees the early childhood educator as reflective of the delicate, complex, situated pedagogical practices necessary to educate young children in the 21st century. The work of early childhood educators is woven within diverse contexts, communities and settings. Inspired by the orientations of the

BC Early Learning Framework, the early childhood educator in BC engages in pedagogical work with obligations and responsibilities necessary to move towards more livable worlds. This position paper extends the ECEBC Code of Ethics (2021) by envisioning an early childhood educator who co-creates pedagogical spaces with children, families and communities. Through an [ethics of care](#) (Langford & Richardson, 2020), the early childhood educator holds a disposition to listen, to be open, to be challenged to think otherwise, to hold space for complexity, and to live joyfully.

ECEBC puts forward the following orientations that educators in British Columbia engage with in pedagogical practices that envision more livable worlds.

### **Educators work with pedagogical commitments**

Educators create and work with pedagogical commitments to respond to current conditions of our time. Today's children inherit challenging issues including rampant climate change, systemic racism, global pandemics, ongoing violence and displacement, war and persecution, poverty, and extractive global trends amongst many others. They also inherit advances in human rights, technology, artistic movements, and other positive shifts in societal values. These conditions demand careful ethical and pedagogical responses that have the potential to enact transformative change. Educators collaboratively craft these pedagogical responses in local contexts, always responding to particular local values as well as global challenges and opportunities without applying universal solutions. These pedagogical commitments and responses contest the dominant discourses of developmentalism and schoolification and bring new narratives into early education.

### **Educators respond to legacies of colonization**

Educators understand the legacies of colonization and critically reflect on the historical and geopolitical circumstances of the lands on which they practice. The pedagogical commitments that educators collaboratively create are responsive to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action, Indigenous Early Learning Child Care Framework (IELCCF), and First People's Principles of Learning. Educators seek to recognize and disrupt the every day, unquestioned practices of early childhood education that perpetuate the legacies of colonization.

## **Educators build responsive relationships**

Educators build responsive relationships with children, families, and communities through an ethics of care that are democratic, inclusive, and joyful. Reciprocal, respectful relationships with sensitivity to land, history, and culture require educators to critically reflect on power imbalances and local context. An ethic of care means educators are welcoming and open to the other, noticing, listening with the recognition of the unknowability and unpredictability of human relations (Langford & Richardson, 2020).

## **Educators co-construct lively curriculum**

Educators co-construct lively curriculum with children, materials, place, and each other as they intentionally experiment with pedagogies. Rather than thinking of curriculum as a series of activities or as a matter of following children's leads, educators design curriculum as living inquiry (Early Childhood Pedagogy Collaboratory, 2021). A living inquiry is where educators and children actively engage in experimentation with materials and ideas and, through the process, co-create worlds (Vintimilla & Kind, 2021). By this we mean that children and educators attend to the challenges and events that are part of their actual lives, think together about how they might respond to these, and find ways to activate pedagogical processes. Through these processes, educators foster dispositions and possibilities for learning to live well together, as put forward by the BC Early Learning Framework (2019). Because a curriculum as a living inquiry is pedagogical, it requires educators who intentionally construct conditions for sustained collaborative work.

## **Educators practice with ethical commitments**

Educators practice with ethical, situational and relational commitments as they negotiate tensions, contradictions and vibrant possibilities that arise in pedagogical work. Ethically intervening requires educators to pay attention to the ethos (ways of life) of their context in order to foster more just and equitable forms of pedagogical practices with children and families. Educators do not follow altruistic and utilitarian principles, neither do they assume a normative morality nor a risk management approach. Rather, ethics is a 'doing and practice' that occurs in the complex relationships and vibrant possibilities that are part of everyday life (Bellacasa, 2017). Educators practice with ethical obligations that do not involve the application of a predetermined answer. These are responsive commitments to act towards a situated vision of a world that sustains life for all (ECEBC Code of Ethics, 2021).

## Acknowledgments

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**If you have any thoughts, curiosities, or questions, we want to hear from you. Please contact Emily Gawlick, ECEBC Executive Director [executive.director@ecebc.ca](mailto:executive.director@ecebc.ca)**

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