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# Ten Years In: Working with Pedagogists at University of Victoria Child Care Services

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**I**n January 2011, Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, then an associate professor at University of Victoria (UVic), was asked to work with Child Care Services (CCS) in the capacity of pedagogical leader. At the same time, Dr. Pacini-Ketchabaw was working with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to extend the Investigating Quality (IQ) Project, which ran between 2005 and 2011, into the Pedagogical Facilitators Pilot Project, which operated in three sites until 2018. These two MCFD-funded projects led to the establishment of the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network, which is implementing the pedagogist role to support early childhood educators in BC. The pedagogist work at CCS has evolved for more than 10 years. This conversation between B. Denise Hodgins, Narda Nelson, Sherri-Lynn Yazbeck, and Kim Ainsworth explores aspects of our shared pedagogical journey. It took place over Zoom on July 29, 2021.

NN: CCS has undergone a significant shift in approach to pedagogy and management over the past 10 years. Can you tell us about those early days, how it felt entering a pedagogical relationship with a pedagogist and what encountering inquiry-based work felt like in the centre?

SLY: When Denise and Veronica first came, for me personally, I was looking for a bit of a change, though I don't think I knew what it was yet.

You brought an interdisciplinary approach that was collective, relational, and really situated here, in the centre, but also specifically on Łək'wəŋən (Lekwungen) territories. Even though I was looking for some kind of change it was still challenging because the approach was totally different than the Euro-Western, individual, developmental, "this is how an early childhood day looks" way I'd been trained in. Challenging is a tricky word. Some people really take that word as a negative. But for me, being challenged was more of an opportunity.

I think, especially as the years progressed, the work has forced me to grapple with the implications of being a settler and part of a hierarchical system in this settler colonial place. It definitely created ruptures in the everyday and made us super uncomfortable. Like Veronica and Denise asking about how we do things, "why do we do it that way?" Again, not being challenged in a negative way but rather wondering, curious. That was the first time I started to think, where *do* my practices come from? Where *does* the knowledge come from that I'm implementing into this sort of practice? I think for all of us within the centre this made us get used to being uncomfortable. It untied us from this teacher-all-knowing sort of way, because suddenly it was all right to not have answers. I think within that dominant Euro-Western, linear, developmental

way you're always looking for, and supposed to be moving toward, an answer. You're not moving with a question or an inquiry, you're moving toward something that's pre-established, an assumed "universal normal." So that was a huge shift for us, from individual thinking to more collective. And this reframing, rethinking is ongoing. It's easy to slip back into how we were trained, how many of us just "were" for such a long time.

KA: When I started in 2014, CCS had been engaging in inquiry-based pedagogical work for a few years. As an educator, I had been part of the Investigating Quality Project in 2011 and 2012 and was grateful to bring that experience to my manager role at UVic, knowing what it was to think with unsettling questions, to carefully reconsider my image of the children and myself as an educator. Largely, I felt very privileged that the pedagogist work at CCS was established, and I was committed to supporting that work and finding ways to influence some change.

BDH: This raises for me how you both have very particular roles. Can you share what working with a pedagogist has meant for you within your specific roles?

SLY: I feel like I have some responsibility to ensure we're thinking with the overarching ethos at CCS, thinking with the BC Early Learning Framework<sup>1</sup> [and] a Common

Worlds<sup>2</sup> orientation. As supervisor, I'm also accountable to how we bring our own ethos and values and to work within that, cocreating pedagogical commitments that are responsive to CCS's overarching ethos and the beliefs that we share here. The pedagogist role is really helpful in that work. My role is to maintain all of that, to create time and space for collective conversations with each other as a team when the pedagogist is here but also when they're not here, so we can continue to think with traces from our work, to dialogue how inquiry work feeds into the general flows and rhythms of the whole day. So, I try to keep all those pieces together but also recognize when maybe we need to shift, when our ethos maybe needs to be more responsive to the times we're in, ecologically, colonially, when those things we see happening in our program might need to shift a little too.

NN: When you say things like *accountability* and *responsibility*, to me that comes back to those pedagogical commitments. Kim, would you add anything to what Sherri-Lynn said?

KA: Well, I echo everything Sherri-Lynn has said. I can't imagine working in a centre that does not have a pedagogist because the role that you both have with us does push us to honour the pedagogical commitments we've made for our day-to-day work. Having a pedagogist helps when we bump up against our assumptions, which we can become stuck in. Inquiry questions get asked in different ways, resources—often outside of the early childhood education field—are shared to sup-

port an interdisciplinary lens and provoke our thinking. Without pedagogists, the pedagogical work we do would become very stagnant. As Sherri-Lynn said, it holds us to become accountable. It holds *me* to become accountable, to ensure teams are supported, for example, with release time for writing narratives, collecting traces, dialoguing together, which I know they do with the children as well as with their teams. It's a wonderful partnership. And you, as pedagogists, work collaboratively with me also. Being a manager can be a bit of a lonely job at times, so for me to be able to think collectively, to have you ask challenging questions or suggest interesting creative ideas, is valuable.

NN: I like that you and Sherri-Lynn have brought up that collectivity. That consciousness-raising process to make visible what it is we are trying to undo, redo, create together, I hear that echoed in everyone's role, that collective sense of responsibility.

When we heard Silvana Calaprice in conversation with Cristina Delgado Vintimilla,<sup>3</sup> she was very clear about roles. Silvana talked about the role of pedagogists in opening up spaces and relations that create conditions *for a collective to respond well to complex contexts*. As pedagogists, she suggests, "we must trace how our concept of the child shapes the situated relations we create, and we must answer to the local relations we create. How we participate in relations is woven with our non-innocent concepts of the human and the child." Are these words resonant with your experience over

the past 10 years of working with a pedagogist? What does "creating conditions for a collective to respond well to complex contexts" mean to you?

SLY: They definitely resonate. Those images—child, educator, environment—they've all had shifts. Instead of one sort of childhood, we've been thinking about multiple and diverse childhoods, that children come with uneven inheritances. Silvana talked about the child, but I think our concept of the child also requires us to think about the educator too because they're so intertwined. Where does our knowledge come from about the child? And how can we create opportunities to be responsive to those multiple diverse childhoods? With the pedagogists, we're recognizing and encountering those differences, figuring out how we live with differences, that's how we've been working to create a collective to respond well. It's like Donna Haraway's (2016) "staying with the trouble." For us, it's about being present and grappling to foreground that relational ethic.

KA: That complexity is challenging. Rethinking the image of the educator as an educated, thinking being, this is an ongoing tension that I see in our field, recognizing the importance of *thinking* in a very localized way, to move beyond the set curriculum, the universal, pre-established formulas Sherri-Lynn was talking about.

NN: And have ripples come out of this sort of collective pedagogical intention?

SLY: I think rippling is everywhere. Like Haro Woods [the forest our

1 <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework>

2 <https://commonworlds.net/>

3 <https://www.ecpn.ca/events/exposures/past/silvana-calaprice-exposure>

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centres back onto]. I never would have thought I'd sit on a community board about Haro Woods for three years! And that sort of drew in a lot of other things (Haro Woods et al., 2018). I think Narda and I on that board created ripples about whose land this is, restoration, and restoring that space so it's not just a back-drop to us. That work rippled to the families and children, to the board. Some of them already thought that way, but I feel like some people really had a shift.

NN: I guess when we use the word *ripples* it's about thinking in radically different ways, for example, in the face of a forest eroding or in the face of a dying rat.

BDH: I think you're both describing Haraway's provocation to "stay with the trouble," which requires deep work because there is no blueprint for how to "respond well" together. It is challenging and complex but also generative. Can you share a little bit about what it means to do this work, over time, in terms of those challenges and those pivotal or affirming moments?

SLY: There always will be challenges, but it's how you meet those challenges. If you see a challenge as a barrier, you can get stuck. I think some of our training feeds into that because so much ECE training is very technical, very health and safety oriented. We aren't really educated to think about pedagogy. Or where knowledge comes from and how it feeds education. Instead, there is this predominant technocratic "meet licensing requirements" focus on a universal way of doing "care." For me, the biggest barrier I've encountered with colleagues comes from this separation that's been created between education

and care. While it's maybe starting to loosen, it has been a barrier for the kind of situated, intentional, experimental ECE we've been talking about. And I don't want to say that we're not healthy and safe, because we are. But that is part of pedagogy; it's not separate.

KA: I think, as Sherri-Lynn's alluded to, developmentalism is an inheritance that has a firm grip. It can be very unbalancing when we try to shift away from it. It's connected as well to the image of the educator as the expert who can speak with certainty about a child's developmental level and what they need at any moment. Along with it is that very child-centred, individualistic view. We need to push against that, moving beyond the images of child/school readiness and children being of value as future citizens versus who they are right now. And broadening human-centric views to see children in relation to everything around them: place, materials, species, and so on.

SLY: In terms of affirming or pivotal moments, there's like *a lot*! I mean, that first charcoal experience was definitely pivotal (Elliot & Yazbeck, 2013). The children, and educators too, and the charcoal were so embodied and affective and connected. There were traces everywhere. We traced it all the way from that room, down campus, to the bathroom here. There was charcoal *everywhere*! It was like a metaphor for bringing the traces with you, how you follow those traces and how you are in relation with materials.

KA: I love that metaphor, the children with the charcoal spreading all over campus. It really demonstrates that children don't live in these little bubbles inside a centre that's outside

of societal life. We've widened our gaze to see child care more broadly within contexts.

SLY: Narda mentioned our witnessing the dying rat (Nelson, 2018). That was huge. We carry that with us. That was the first time we thought about "diplomatic proposals," which I eventually wrote about in my MEd final project (Yazbeck, 2021). The children brought that diplomatic proposal to us when they talked, and that set us in motion. Now it's not just rats we're trying to think about diplomatically.

KA: Well, the rat. I'm not sure which dying rat you were speaking about because we've had a few encounters now. But when the rats showed up, that brought up a lot of challenging ethical questions for all of us, for me as well in my role of manager who is supposed to "fix" things (Yazbeck et al., 2020).

SLY: There are so many moments. And I think over time there *has* to be. We're not static. The work, done over time, is dynamic *and* situated. We have to be willing to let traces shift and linger with us so that new ideas and new inquiries and new ways of thinking that are relevant to the times we're in can revisit past ones. That goes with documenting, how we carry those traces. We've reengaged with pieces of documentation that came from other times but were entangled with this year's documentation. The children grow with the stories too. Stories get shared with siblings, shared by children staying from the year before with the new children at the centre. That time piece—it's not linear temporality.

KA: Other pivotal moments have been our exhibits. For me those rippled out into the broader com-

munity, making child care visible as *thinking spaces* for living with and responding to our current times, spaces where we face extremely complex questions.

NN: I'm really glad you brought that up, Kim. Reminded me of our first exhibit and how a city parks worker happened to come by. He sought us out and said, "This is exactly what I'm seeing." He wanted the exhibit to come down to City Hall. For me, it spoke to what it means to engage as part of a public. You spoke beautifully about how children, instead of *future stewards*, are part of the *now* of what's happening.

As Canada is poised to create a national system of early learning and child care<sup>4</sup> and BC is the first early learning and care agreement signatory,<sup>5</sup> in your opinion, what should Canadians know about ECE, pedagogically speaking?

SLY: I am excited about \$10 a Day Plan, but I'm also worried. Words like *national child care system*, where BC is poised to massively increase child care spaces over the next 5 to 7 years—what will happen to pedagogy within that? Also, we really struggle trying to find educators to replace the ones who are leaving the field now. More spaces on a massive scale worries me that they will just speed up the education process because "we need to get going with this, we need bodies to work in those spaces so we can put people back to work." I think it could be great, but I think it has to be done cautiously so the work can be responsive to place and led by educators who are well educated, well paid, and so pedagogy doesn't get lost.

KA: As Sherri-Lynn said, there are issues with not having enough educators in the field. And we need educators who have higher education, who want to stay in this field, who are recognized. I want child care to be seen as something more than just a place where children go so that parents can work and it keeps the economy going, but to see child care as something that really matters because it is life as well.

SLY: I hope that government, Canadians, really think about what's behind this system, what knowledges will shape what we're going to do on this "massive scale" in "more spaces."

BDH: As I listen, I think part of what you both have been gesturing toward is that we choose to work in particular ways—as you said, with a Common Worlds orientation, thinking with the BC Early Learning Framework—because we need, as a sector, to move beyond service provision logics and challenge status quo technocratic practice.

SLY: Yeah. We cannot continue to follow that more developmental, universalizing, less locally specific, situated practices. That will just keep that market-based economic drive going. It will not move this profession forward.

BDH: Or attend to the situated living-as-well-as-possible in, for example, a context of climate crises, a context of truth and reconciliation...

SLY: Yeah! I feel like, look where we're at right now! How can we look at where we are now and not recognize we need a change?

BDH: We need a different kind of education.

SLY: Yes. *All* the way through. Not just early childhood. This is *all* the way through.

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4 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2021/04/budget-2021-a-canada-wide-early-learning-and-child-care-plan.html>

5 <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2021/07/08/canada-announces-historic-first-early-learning-and-child-care>