



Early Childhood Education

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On the cover: The art work/mural is from the Langevin Science School, an alternative school within the Calgary Board of Education. It is from Ms Danielle Beach's Grade 1 class. The students have been exploring the June 2013 flood. As part of this study, the class decided that a walk along the Bow River would further their understanding of the topic. On returning from their walk, the students were given an opportunity to reflect on their experience through a classroom mural. This connected perfectly with the artist in residence, Charlie Johnson, who is currently helping the entire school to create a science-themed mural. The children were thrilled to practise their colour-mixing skills to paint the river that would serve as the background. Students were also asked to select one memory from the trip and to represent this memory either independently or with a partner. They were given a choice of medium and left to explore, experiment and create. The result is 25 unique pieces that hold individual meaning for the students and provide a timeline and memory of their trip.

From the Editor's Desk

Dear friends and colleagues

When I took over the editorship of *Early Childhood Education*, in 2007, I promised you that I would continue to keep the high standards of the journal as a peer-reviewed, professional publication that attracts scholars and practitioners alike and provides a sought-after venue for sharing their views, research and experiences in the field of early childhood education. As I step down from the role of editor, I look back at the last seven years with a deep sense of accomplishment. Not only did the journal attract international, national and local contributors, it also published only original articles—no reprints were included in the journal under my editorship. The reason I am proud of this accomplishment is that I was able to enact the vision I had for the journal—to be a vehicle that brings to you not only the best but also the most current research, thoughts and experiences the authors want to communicate. I also view the journal as a vehicle for advocacy for high-quality early childhood research and practices and that exemplifies young children's teaching and learning from which we can all learn. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve my community in this way. I am very excited to pass the editorship on to my colleague Pamela Winsor, professor of language and literacy at the University of Lethbridge, whose national and international reputation and passion for the right to education of children in vulnerable circumstances will, without a doubt, help the journal establish an even more prominent position in the field of early childhood education worldwide.

There is another reason that I am grateful to you, my professional community. I am deeply honoured that I was selected as the recipient of the 2013 Advocate for Young Children award. As a teacher educator and a researcher, I am always concerned that, in my role as university professor, I might appear to be somewhat removed from children and the "real world" of teachers. This award acknowledges that you, my closest colleagues and peers, do not see it this way, and I am grateful!

My professional life as an early childhood educator has revolved around the question central to the nature of pedagogy: What does it mean to educate and bring up children and young people?

This question can be approached from at least two starting points. On one hand, we can start by an appropriation of a theory of education and then let our actions be informed by this theory. On the other, we can start with life itself and let our reflections about our living and working with children help us to better understand pedagogical theory. I am still looking for a meaningful balance between these two starting points.

A central theme in my professional career has been pedagogical reflection and its role in the lives of educators with children. The unique interactive reality of teaching requires instant judgments and immediate actions in which the opportunity for reflective detachment is severely limited. Thus, teachers' professional knowledge needs to be embodied in moment-to-moment living with children in such a way that decisions and actions remain ethically sensitive to pedagogical goals (van Manen 1992).¹ In the context of teacher education, a beginning point of acquiring this type of knowledge is a dialogue.

Dialogue provides the milieu for discussion of the most critical questions in the field of early childhood education: How do we construct our notions of the young child? What is our understanding of who the young child is, can be and should be? What is the role of early childhood institutions, educators, parents, community and society in educating and caring for children? I believe my role as a teacher educator is to engage pre- and inservice teachers in such a dialogue and thus to help them gain a better understanding of what it means to educate children and young people in today's complex world with its uncertainties and conflicting views, values and aims.

I strongly believe that to educate children and young people means not only to engage them in experiences that are appropriate and formative but also to involve them in democratic dialogue and decision making and an understanding of childhood. To me, this means helping preservice teachers understand that learning "what works" in an early childhood classroom is not enough to engage children in such a dialogue. Early childhood educators need to create learning environments that reflect the social and cultural contexts that have

¹ Van Manen, M. 1992. *The Tact of Teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness*. London, Ont: Althouse.

shaped and continue to shape children and families' experiences, and expand the possibilities that they may have not had in these contexts. We need to support children in learning how to explore their own ideas and understandings about the worlds in which they live, to pose critical questions about them, to use a variety of ways to gather information that pertains to these questions, and to present their new understandings to others. As early childhood educators we must strive to give children opportunities to make decisions, solve problems, consider different points of view and provide alternative solutions. We can accomplish this by guiding children through different strategies of investigation of topics they are interested in and by creating situations in which they have to apply knowledge, seek various ways of accessing new information or both. We should have high expectations for all children, and I work hard with them so that they are fully engaged in meaningful tasks. Since we wish to encourage choice and

creativity, however, we should not prescribe what children should do at each step. By providing sufficient time and opportunities to play, we support children in recreating and reconstructing their understandings of the world without taking away their personal goals and ideas. As a result, the children will have a strong sense of ownership of their work and pride in their accomplishments.

After 23 years, I can sincerely say that all my experience teaching young children as well as pre- and inservice early childhood educators has been a humbling experience that has left me with more questions than answers. Some of these questions I have attempted to answer through my research; others are yet to be asked. I believe, however, that even the unasked questions have made me a better teacher and a better person—but I will leave this judgment to you.

With my most deeply felt appreciation

Anna Kirova 🧑

Supporting Indigenous Children and Parents in Early Childhood Settings

Cathy Richardson and Isaac Romano

Cathy Richardson/Kinewesquao, PhD, is a Métis associate professor in the School of Social Work, Indigenous Specializations, at the University of Victoria. Her practice has included Aboriginal early child development, family therapy, child welfare and safety planning. Cathy is a researcher, practitioner and scholar in Aboriginal identity, well-being and recovery from violence.

Isaac Romano, MSc, is a parent counsellor and educator, early childhood educator, and activist. He is engaged in community development, conflict reduction and peacemaking. He is the founder and director of the Jewish Community Centre of the Eastern Townships, in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and is a trained diversity facilitator with NCBI (National Coalition Building Institute) in the US.

Abstract

In this article, authors Cathy Richardson and Isaac Romano draw from their experience with early childhood education, counselling, parent support and cultural rituals to describe practices to support the Aboriginal early childhood development (ECD) experience. They have recently developed a course for early childhood educators who work with Aboriginal populations in various contexts. They describe the process of centring Indigenous culture, working with elders to design culturally sound rituals and incorporating Indigenous teachings and stories. As well, they present a number of practice ideas about supporting children in times of distress or disconnection, promoting a sense of inclusion and belonging among children in care settings. These practices include cultural safety and learning about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. They discuss the importance of becoming an ally and working across difference and how to incorporate/centre Indigenous ways of being and knowing in an early childhood setting. Finally, the authors provide approaches for practice, including “deep listening” to restore a child’s sense of connection and esteem following experiences of distress. Richardson and Romano share Indigenous examples of community-centred models or “hubs,” which other community members and services can “wrap around” in the participatory care of children.

Introduction

This article is designed to orient the early childhood practitioner to cross-cultural learning in the specific area of Indigenous early childhood education and development. In this work, the authors present perspectives on cultural bridge building as well as practices that place Indigenous world view, values and methods at the centre of early childhood settings. Even though not all early childhood educators come from an Indigenous background, there are aspects to working with Indigenous children in a culturally grounded manner that will rely on workers building relationships within the local Indigenous communities. Through these relationships, information and support may be elicited to support the Indigenous curriculum and planning. This article will provide some insight about how early childhood practitioners can reach out, build relationships and follow appropriate protocols in order to decolonize, strengthen and organize early childhood programming to support Indigenous children in their culture.

Terminology Used

In this article, the terms *Indigenous* and *Aboriginal* are used interchangeably. There are three Aboriginal groups recognized in the Canadian constitution (*Constitution Act 1982*): First Nations, Métis and Inuit. As well, there are urban Aboriginals, status and non-status, 6-1s and 6-2s, and other categorizations of Indigenous people through Canada’s racialized legislation known as the *Indian Act* (King 2003). The term *Indian* or *Native* is used only when it is used as such in federal documents or articles. *Early childhood development* tends to include prebirth to age 9 or 10, depending on the source. In this course, childhood will be considered to go to age 12, a time before puberty/adolescence. *Early childhood development* includes working with families,

communities, service providers and elders to ensure the holistic well-being and education of Indigenous children. This work involves an active engagement with self, opening to new ideas and perspectives that may exist in a world view that is substantively different than the European-Canadian or western world view.

While it is important to be cautious in overgeneralizing about people and cultures, the term *world view* relates to what is called *epistemology* and *ontology*—the nature of knowing and the nature of being found in a particular society. This course centres an Indigenous world view, in which there are many diverse views and cultural practices. While every society has alternative influences and subcultures, we will explore broader traditional practices related to the cultural survival, substance, spirituality and flourishing of Indigenous peoples. You are wholeheartedly invited to bring your own culture, traditions and perspectives to the forefront of your knowing while learning about those that are important for Indigenous children.

The term *epistemology* in western research refers to ways of creating, experiencing and constructing knowledge. *Ontology* refers to ways of being, the nature of “being-ness.” Much of European culture and knowledge has been described as scientific in nature, perhaps since the time of the Renaissance and then again in the Industrial Revolution (Kuhn 1962). Knowledge and “truth” were taken apart in ways that could be analyzed by students of life to decide how things work. This knowledge was sometimes removed from its origins or context. The nature of Indigenous knowledge or cosmology has been described as related to ancestry and ancestors, integral to the land, circular and holistic, including concerns and functions of the mind, body, spirit and emotions. Holistic representations of knowledge are propagated/taught through holistic processes, such as storytelling, dream interpretation, and engaging in rituals and ceremonies that acknowledge the relationship and interdependence with Mother Earth. Well-being in life for Indigenous children has been evidenced as being related to connection to culture and extended family and having a solid sense of identity. As articulated in the United Nations rights of the Indigenous child, one has a sense of one’s people, one’s land, one’s traditional languages and one’s ancestors (Carriere and Richardson 2009; Ermine 1995; Greenwood and Shawana 2003; Sinclair 2007).¹

Looking back to 1972, to the National Indian Brotherhood’s “Indian Control of Indian Education” document, the concerns of that time appear to remain relevant:

Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him [or her], the history of his [or her] people, their values, their language, he [or she] will never really know himself [or herself] or his [or her] potential as a human being. (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations 1972, 9)

Beginning with an Acknowledgement of Land and Territory

All early childhood programs are situated on land, on someone’s traditional territory. Whether we are talking about an inner-city program, an on-reserve program or a program in sub-urban Canada, it is likely to be situated on unceded Indigenous land. The acknowledgement of this fact, in itself, can be considered an initial act of decolonization. This paper is written on traditional Coast Salish, Cowichan territory and Abenki territory in Quebec. To begin, we acknowledge the ancestors of these lands, Mother Earth and the nations who have traditionally cared for this land through their presence.

Some of the questions we invite early childcare providers to consider are below. ECE/ECD students are asked to do this research where they live, to learn about the Indigenous children and families they may be serving.

- Who are the Indigenous peoples in your local area?
- What Indigenous languages are spoken in your area?
- What does the map of Indigenous peoples in your area look like?
- What is a treaty? Which treaties were signed in your province?
- What are land claims?
- What kinds of Aboriginal family-supporting organizations and agencies exist?
- What are the protocols for visiting Aboriginal communities?

Learning the lay of the land and about the Indigenous people on that land is the first step toward becoming an effective cross-cultural early

¹ Editor’s note: see also “General Comment No 11 (2009): Indigenous Children and Their Rights Under the Convention,” available at www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.GC.C.11.doc (accessed June 5, 2014).

childhood educator, as well as working, living and learning in a decolonizing Canada.

Learning About Culture— One's Own Culture

While it is important that an early childhood educator have a basic sense of the local Indigenous culture, it is not a realistic or particularly helpful goal to become an “expert” on Indigenous culture. What is more imperative is to have a sense of one's own culture and ancestry, in order to truly appreciate what it means to feel “filled” by one's culture, to be guided by culture in the important aspects of life and the life cycle (such as birth, naming, learning, adolescent rites of passage, parenthood, elderhood). Research on Indigenous well-being states, unequivocally, that culture and belonging, including the running of one's own community services, relate directly to the thriving of Indigenous children. Having a relationship to one's own culture and ancestors forms a solid foundation from which to “work across difference” with Aboriginal families. Indigenous educator Robina Thomas states, “I don't have to go to church to learn how to work with Christians, just like you don't have to go to our Thi'Lelum (Big House) to learn how to work with Indigenous people. What you need to learn is how to work across difference” (Robina Thomas, personal communication, Social Work 354, University of Victoria).

Cultural Safety and Colonialism

The practice of cultural safety is an important quality or spirit as the essence of working with diversity and in Indigenous-centred environments. Basically, this means that the setting will be pro-inclusion, pro-diversity, Indigenous-centric and anti-racist. In a context of colonialism, the term *cultural safety*, which was developed in the Aoteroan Maori nursing community, serves an antidote to Eurocentric or structurally racist policies (Papps and Ramsden 1996; McDonald 2001; National Aboriginal Health Organization [NAHO] 2006). In this context, students learn to “walk alongside” Indigenous families, to support their sacred concerns and aspirations for their children. Workers are invited to consider how to become an ally to Indigenous families. Activist and community counsellor/educator Vikki Reynolds has articulated a process for walking alongside in her article “The Role of Allies in Anti-Violence Work” (2008). She documents practices for working as an ally, across

difference and across cultural lines, to promote social justice and inclusion. If students are asked to assume this stance before they are prepared in their own analysis and learning, an “honouring diversity” workshop or training may be important for childcare staff. One example of such a successful pro-diversity model is the NCBI (National Coalition Building Institute) method, used with the Los Angeles Police Department during the time of the Rodney King riots (see <http://ncbi.org/our-clients/>). In British Columbia, Cathy Richardson and Jeannine Carriere delivered a successful five-day Aboriginal cultural awareness training for Ministry of Children and Family child and youth mental health workers (Carriere and Richardson 2013). There may be local models developed specifically for your local context. Where possible, local models are probably the best because they prepare workers to meet issues and conditions in the local community with specific tribal groups.

Cultural safety education focuses on teaching students about colonial history and its attack on Indigenous peoples. Cultural safety can form a background of respect for educational engagement, learning and exploration in this course. In relation to the content, ie, Indigenous early child education and development, cultural safety relates to restoring historical harm in various contexts, promoting decolonization, working respectfully across difference and working towards social justice.

Cultural safety education focuses on student self-discovery. It is important that as students engage in a reflective practice they are aware of what they bring to professional interactions, including their attitudes, metaphors, beliefs and values with an understanding of their cultural implications.

Cultural Safety and Connection

An approach that centres Indigenous ways of knowing and being does not exclude non-Aboriginal children from the program. Such programming assumes the courageous and decolonizing stance of privileging Indigenous culture and the methods for promoting inclusion, belonging and identity that are central to the well-being of Indigenous children. ECD scholars and practitioners have shown us that children want to feel connected to other people (Carriere and Richardson 2013, 2009; Gerber 2013; Romano 1999).

Young children want to be connected to other people, but this sense of connection is fragile, particularly in a colonial context where it has been

consistently undermined. Promoting isolation, separation and cultural erasure were strategies of colonization that saw children kidnapped from families and placed into institutions referred to euphemistically as residential schools. Similar strategies were repeated through child welfare strategies, and Indigenous children remain over-represented in child removals today despite later 20th-century commitments to social justice.

This is one of the reasons that caring for children is considered a sacred task. Elders tell us that children are gifts from the Creator, and their development (physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social) has been traditionally approached with great care and delicacy. Cree elder Eddie Bellrose said that the purpose of life is to care for children. He reminds us that someone cared for us when we were children, and now it is time to care for a child. The children's sense of connection is easily broken through separation, isolation, criticism and experiences that are stressful and too hard to process developmentally.

When children experience disrespect or disconnection, their need for love and dignity is violated. Children let us know when their sense of connection has been broken in various ways, one being through acting out with behaviours of protest (letting us know something isn't right). Providing cultural safety is a basic step toward restoring dignity and connection—their need to belong and feel love and appreciation.

Cultural safety education enables students to respect diversity. Respecting and acknowledging the dignity of each person may include dignifying practices (Richardson and Wade 2008) such as asking permission of others before acting or offering advice. In professional settings, it means asking the family what would be helpful for them, and asking permission before requesting information or acting on their behalf. Cultural safety can protect marginalized people from the imposition of dominant cultural ideas and practices, opening space for difference and Indigenous practice.

As early child educators, we can meet children's developmental and learning needs while providing cultural safety. This means ensuring we do not blame Indigenous families for historical process and current plights. It means doing research on colonialism and learning about the background to social conditions and relations of disparity in Canada. It means learning about the dynamics of racism to which Indigenous families are subjected and ways to restore past harms through kindness, through being an ally and walking alongside those we work with and the children we serve.

Why Is Cultural Safety Needed?

The presence of colonialism in Canada and the attempted destruction of Indigenous culture and communities mean that it is important that early childhood educators educate themselves about this situation. For example, it is relevant to be aware that

- nearly half of children in foster care are First Nations, Métis and Inuit (<http://aptn.ca/news/2013/05/08/nearly-half-of-children-in-foster-care-aboriginal-statistics-canada>; Woods and Kirkey 2013); many Indigenous adults were raised in foster care;
- many Indigenous adults were placed in non-Aboriginal adoptive homes. According to Indigenous researcher Raven Sinclair, the adoption breakdown rates for Aboriginal adoptees was often as high as 95 per cent (Sinclair 2007);
- the majority of status Indians were forced to attend the internment facilities referred to as *residential schools*. This relates to the past hundred years of Canada's history, so at least three or four generations in one family may have been interned as children and taken from their parents by force, in accordance with the *Indian Act*;
- most of the Indigenous people in prison were in foster care;
- most Indigenous people experience some form of racism on a daily basis; and
- at the time of contact, 100 per cent of the land was held by the First Peoples. Today, less than one-quarter of 1 per cent of the total land in Canada is held by Aboriginal people; over 99 per cent is in the hands of non-Aboriginal Canadians (Coyes 1997).

Topics that are important in an ECD/ECE curriculum include

- racism and anti-Aboriginal prejudice;
- systemic discrimination and laws of segregation;
- Indigenous resistance and responses to colonization;
- the internment of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children in institutions called *residential schools*;
- child welfare, foster care, adoption and the history of mass child removal and the "Sixties Scoop"; and
- the five Rs related to Indigenous life—reserves, RCMP, racism, residential school and religion (Gerry Oleman, the Indian Residential School Survivors' Society, cited in Young-Leon 2011, 26).

Philosophies of Connection and Interconnection

Indigenous prayers tend to end with the words “All my relations.” These words indicate the sacred interconnection of all life forms, that one cannot exist without the other and that well-being is based on this interconnection. Early childhood educators are encouraged to engage with Indigenous elders and cultural consultants/educators to impart the important teachings so central to Indigenous life. Such teachings include

- Indigenous world view and local stories of creation and relationship,
- the philosophy of interconnectedness,
- teachings related to land and place,
- the role of animals in Indigenous life, and
- perspectives on learning and knowledge.

Many of these teachings and lessons can be summarized with the question “What does it mean to be human (within my culture)?” The more the individual child is contextualized and situated within his/her people and traditions, the more likely that the child will experience a sense of purpose and belonging (Carriere and Richardson 2009).

While Indigenous philosophies are unique to Indigenous communities, complementary theories can be found in western literature, provided that they include an analysis of social interaction, ecology and adversity/oppression. Many European theories of childhood do not talk about oppression, which is central to the lives of Indigenous communities. Theories such as those of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), with his ecological model, and sociologist Erving Goffman, in his study of stigma and life in institutions (1963, 1961), probably come closest to understanding some of the ecological complexities in developing a sense of self. One of Bronfenbrenner’s contributions is the inclusion of culture in the systemic model, given that culture is such a source of strength and spirituality for many Indigenous families.

Within Indigenous social structures, elders are traditionally highly regarded as teachers, philosophers, linguists, historians, healers, judges and counsellors (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996, cited in Gerlach, Smith and Schneider 2008). While not every elderly person self-identifies as *elder* in terms of passing on traditions, communities typically identify elders and grant them respect as transmitters of intergenerational knowledge. Grandparents are traditionally valued as teachers, passing on their knowledge and practices to the next generation (Gerlach, Smith and Schneider 2008). For many

families, “together time” involves participating in activities that reflect a vital link to a community’s identity and history—whether it be fishing, berry picking or hunting (Gerlach, Smith and Schneider 2008).

Aboriginal Child Development

For many Aboriginal peoples, child development refers to a child’s spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical wellbeing with a special consideration of the Aboriginal context of his or her community and culture (Carriere and Richardson 2008). This includes everything from storytelling, smudging, learning, singing and practising community protocols to being introduced to traditional foods and customs. Such practice and belief represent quality children’s services and education in that they contribute to building and/or maintaining the child’s emotional and spiritual well-being. This will help children acquire the skills, resiliency and confidence to succeed in any education system. This success can be promoted by instilling in children the prosocial values of their culture.

British Columbia Aboriginal Infant Development Coordinator Diana Elliot promotes the Seven Sacred Teachings in her work with Indigenous ECD: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth. Each teaching honours one of the basic virtues intrinsic to a full and healthy life. Each law is embodied by an animal to underscore the point that all actions and decisions made by man are manifest on a physical plane. The animal world taught man how to live close to the earth, and the connection that has been established between the animal world and that of man has instilled a respect for all life in those who follow the traditional Aboriginal way (<http://schools.cbe.ab.ca/b244/seven.htm>).

Practice That Strengthens Connection

Early childhood practitioners can assist children in ways that strengthen children’s sense of connection with others. They can help children work through moments of difficulty. When we refer to children as “acting out,” they are often experiencing disconnection or trying to work through an experience that is difficult to process. Early childhood educators and students in educational programs can be taught about dignity-based practices (Richardson and Wade 2008) and practices of deep listening, similar to those

described in Patty Wipfler's "Hand in Hand" parenting.²

Key skills include

- the benefits of deep listening;
- learning to assess the child's needs in the moment;
- addressing challenging child behaviours with "the spot assessment";
- supporting mothers, fathers and caregivers and intervening in ways that acknowledge and strengthen their bond/sense of connection with their child;
- respecting the feelings of children by telling or showing them that it is okay to have these feelings;
- incorporating opportunities for child laughing and child-led play for stress release and child self-care;
- engaging in adult peer support in the work setting through empathic listening and emotional release (as a clinical supervision practice); and
- creating a culturally-centred, integrated community space for ECD programming.

These methods can promote the goals of Indigenous child care and early childhood development.

Promoting Holistic Well-Being Through Emotional Expression and Support

Parenting instructor and child developmental psychologist Aletha Solter, who studied for two years with Jean Piaget in Switzerland at the University of Geneva, wrote that children have "inborn repair kits," referring to their inherent processes of crying, laughing, symbolic playing and talking about their problems (Solter 1989). When children have been disrupted by experiences that are stressful and difficult to process, adults can help them return to a state of calm, balance and connection. As Gerber (1979) outlined, offering "full listening" to a child who is in distress constitutes offering a form of respect that can help meet the child's need for closeness and security, thus helping the child to feel better.

In the ECD curriculum, we encouraged early child educators to (1) make sure that the child's needs for attention, closeness and security are met; (2) attend to the child's needs after making sure the child is not ill or in pain; and then (3) "just listen" to the child's crying and the child's feelings in order to

help restore the child to well-being and a sense of connection. When this sense of connection is restored, the child will be ready to re-engage with his or her surroundings.

We encourage early child educators to approach a child's difficult behaviour within a framework of connection and dignity (eg, has the child been excluded or humiliated?). When a child "acts out" in an ECD setting, it is an indication that the child's sense of connection has been temporarily disrupted. In that moment, it is important to be able to assess the reasons for the child's "acting out" in a way that is developmentally appropriate. Solter encourages early childhood educators/caregivers to ask and to developmentally assess on the spot, asking, "Does the child have a legitimate need for attention, closeness, food, stimulation, autonomy? Are the child's needs being thwarted in some way?" (Solter 1989).

We add to Solter's list the following considerations:

- If the child is a First Nations, Métis or Inuit child in a mainstream child care setting, one might also ask if the child's culture and sense of inclusion are being thwarted in some way. Is the child's culture being acknowledged and upheld as part of the curriculum?
- Does the child lack a piece of information, or is he or she too young to understand or remember a rule?
- Does the child have an accumulation of stress from the past? Is he or she feeling anxious, jealous, fearful, angry?

Stress can be defined as the accumulation of unprocessed physical and emotional pain. The plan of action depends on the results of the assessment.

Patty Wipfler has identified an intervention called Staylistening. In her Hand in Hand Parenting approach, Wipfler recommends using deep listening to address a child's behaviour when the child is feeling disconnected and is acting out in a form of protest.

Wipfler says that a child who is not feeling good has a lot of feelings to share. This is the impetus behind the tantrum or angry outbursts or actions. She reminds us that crying is *not* bad and that laughing is an important function for clearing the mind of "emotional gunk" and helping repair the sense of connection. She says that we can "allow a child to tell us and show us how bad it feels on the inside." It can take a while, but this is a healthy developmental process. As caregivers, we can help

² See www.handinhandparenting.org.

a child to feel good by supporting him or her to “offload emotionally,” to dissolve blocks, allowing them to function well. Sometimes we have to offer a good 20 minutes to support a child through tears and difficult emotions, just listening and reassuring the child that he or she is safe and cared for. Afterwards, a child who feels good again may act as if the episode never happened.

Crying does not mean that we or they have done something wrong; crying often means that there is a healing process in progress. And rather than telling children “Don’t be afraid,” “Stop crying” or “Be a big boy,” we can tell them, by giving good attention and eye contact and by our facial expression, that it’s okay to be afraid, supporting them where they are in the moment. It helps children when we give them permission to feel what they are feeling.³

The caregiver can plan ways to provide more attention and quality time to an older child once the younger one has been taken care of. Perhaps the baby will soon nap. The caregiver can then take that opportunity to be with the older child. Since children are experts on tension release, they will do what they need to do to get the attention of the adult and find security. The adult can then unbusy him- or herself from other tasks (or multitasking) to be more fully present with the child. At that moment, the caregiver can give the child full attention and follow the child’s lead in the interaction.

When adults are distracted or multitasking, children sense that they are less important than other things and begin to feel disconnected. Building in times of connection and attention is the remedy for this sense of not mattering.

“Hand-in-hand parenting” approaches such as Staylistening can also be effective among colleagues in a work setting. The purpose is to help one another, in the intimacy and safety of a private space, to express feelings that may be causing distress and impairing healthy, happy interaction.

While these interventions may not have been developed in an Indigenous context, they can be relevant for Aboriginal communities if they succeed in restoring that vital sense of connection, belonging and being cared for by loved ones.

Community-Centred Care

The final point in this article is the importance of community-centred care. Researchers and Indigenous communities have expressed the benefits

of establishing a variety of social services centred on early childhood educational services and care. Children are the centre of the community, and caring for children can become an activity of priority for the entire community (Ball 2010, 2008). Various Indigenous communities have included child care services at the centre of their community. There are models from Euro-cultures that demonstrate the desires of community to self-organize. One such model was called the Peckham Experiment (Goodway 2007).

Peckham centred on early childhood care and learning based on community self-organization. It reflected the English community at the time, reflecting movements of anarchism and socialism in which people took more responsibility for preparing their society for community-driven life. Only the medical part of Peckham was kept private; all other aspects were organized by the families, who also selected the ECD/ECE curriculum. To participate, you had to live within the distance you could walk with a baby stroller. During 1926–29, the centre was joined by 115 families (or about 400 individuals).

Principles of Community Dignity and Self-Determination

Author and former Mohawk psychiatrist Clare Brant, who has since passed away, wrote about what he calls *Native ethics*. His article (Brant 1990) can be informative in showing non-Aboriginal helpers about some of the general cultural differences between Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal ways of being. To summarize, he says that the following principles need to be understood and respected in the interactions with Native peoples and communities. He based this analysis on his 24 years of work with Indigenous communities in Quebec and Ontario. These principles are (1) conflict suppression, (2) noninterference, (3) noncompetitiveness, (4) emotional restraint, (5) sharing (6) the Native concept of time, (7) the Native attitude toward gratitude and approval, (8) protocol and (9) teaching by modelling. The most important themes from Brant’s research seem to be finding the delicate balance between being an ally—a helper/supporter—and not telling others what to do. This is an act of preserving the dignity of others and their cultural practices.

³ For access to more information about Patty Wipfler and her programs, visit her website, www.handinhandparenting.org.

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Developmentally Appropriate Use of Technology and Interactive Media with Young Children

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Abstract

Young children are living in a world of technology and are actively using manipulatives, digital and nondigital technology, and interactive media. This article discusses developmentally appropriate practices in technology and interactive media that both teachers and families can use. It defines the terms *technology* and *interactive media*; summarizes the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position statement on technology and interactive media; describes developmentally appropriate practices in technology based on NAEYC's 2012 position statement on technology and interactive media and the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) technological benchmarks; examines principles and guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices in the use of technology and interactive media; discusses both children's and families' use of technology and interactive media; and concludes with several recommendations for children, teachers and families on the use of technology and interactive media.

Introduction

Learning to use information technology is a must in the 21st, "digital" century (Gudanescu 2010). Currently, practically everybody depends on multiple types of technology such as laptops, smartphones and tablets. Technology tools are used for communication, collaboration, social networking and user-generated substance and have

modified society's everyday culture. Specifically, technology tools have changed the way (a) teachers use classroom materials with young children and communicate with families, (b) educators prepare teachers and their professional development and (c) families manage their everyday lives and search for entertainment (Barron et al 2011; Jackson 2011a, 2011b; Wahi et al 2011).

The availability of technology in various early childhood education settings in the United States seems to be increasing. Early childhood programs are increasing their use of computers, Internet access and other digital technologies. Technology devices are used for interaction, cooperation, social networking and user-generated substance that have changed the everyday culture. Teachers assume the responsibility of searching for ways to adapt and integrate these new technologies to promote young children's learning.

The purpose of this article is to describe developmentally appropriate practices in technology and interactive media that both teachers and families can use. It also discusses their effects on young children, their teachers and their families. First, it defines the terms *technology* and *interactive media*. Next it summarizes the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position statement on technology and interactive media. It describes developmentally appropriate practices in technology based on NAEYC's 2012 position statement on technology and interactive media and the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) technological benchmarks. It examines principles and guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices on the use of technology and interactive media. It discusses both children's and families' use of technology and interactive media. Finally, it concludes with recommendations for children's, teachers' and families' use of technology and interactive media.

Defining Technology and Interactive Media

Young children are living in a world of technology and are actively using manipulatives, digital and nondigital technology, and interactive media. With this in mind, it is important to define the terms *technology* and *interactive media*. According to Schomburg and Donohue (2009),

Too often we equate “technology” with electronic media only. Yet ... technology is a term that can apply to any tool that helps us ... to work ... to learn ... to play. [...] We might think of technology as providing digital manipulatives for children ... tools that serve the same purpose as Froebel’s gifts or the Montessori materials ... or any of the other materials that we provide for young children in our programs. Technology provides us with digital tools for learning. We should be asking: What can children learn from these tools? What can they DO with these tools? (p 3)

Gudanescu (2010) defines technology as an assortment of tools that can be used to promote children’s learning. *Technology* refers to computers, machines or hardware, systems, smart applications, methods of organization, and techniques. Children’s learning can be increased through various kinds of technology, ranging from video content and digital moviemaking to laptop computing and handheld technologies. In addition, modern types of technology (such as podcasting) are continuously being developed. Technology for very young children includes all of the materials (both digital and nondigital) with which they work, learn and play (Alper 2013). The NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media reinforce this definition in their 2012 position statement and expand it to include interactive media (NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012). They define *interactive media* as digital and analog materials that consist of software programs, applications (apps), broadcast and streaming media, several children’s television programs, e-books, the Internet, and other types of content that children can use actively and creatively to socially engage and interact with other children and adults. This position statement is summarized in the next section.

NAEYC 2012 Position Statement

The first NAEYC position statement, in 1996, provided reasonable assistance for the use of

technology in developmentally appropriate practices. Currently, early childhood education professionals are more aware of, responsive to and accepting of the function of technology in their early childhood education classroom. The pervasiveness and importance of technology in young children’s lives have been justified (eg, Parette, Quesenberry and Blum 2010; Peurling 2012; Schomburg and Donohue 2009). In 2012, NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College revised and expanded NAEYC’s 1996 position statement on technology. Their position statement, titled *Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*, focuses on the effective practice of media and technology in early childhood education. It acknowledges the constant change in the digital age and recommends to early childhood educators ways to use technology and interactive media to promote young children’s cognitive, social, emotional, physical and linguistic development in a developmentally appropriate environment. Both the 2012 NAEYC position statement and Cooper (2005) recommend that developmentally appropriate environments for technology and interactive media allow young children the freedom to explore, experiment and take risks. Children need to be encouraged to use their critical thinking, make decisions, solve problems, reflect and engage in social interactions. A previous and different position statement, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age Eight*, by Copple and Bredekamp (2009) supports these recommendations in the selection of developmentally appropriate materials for young children.

NAEYC’s 1996 and 2012 position statements also provide information on several topics concerning young children’s use of technology: (1) teachers’ responsibility in determining the proper uses of technology; (2) the potential benefits when using technology in early childhood programs; (3) the integration of technology in a standard learning environment; (4) the possibilities for all children to be able to use technology, including children with disabilities and who are linguistically diverse; (5) the prevention of stereotyping and violence in software; (6) the issues in using technology tools and interactive media; (7) the responsibility of both teachers and parents to serve as advocates; and (8) the use of technology for professional development (Saracho and Spodek 2008). However, the 2012 NAEYC position statement acknowledges the constant change in the

digital age and suggests developmentally appropriate ways to use technology and interactive media.

The position statement by NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center (2012) recommends how to properly and deliberately use current technology and interactive media to network with individual children and their families. It offers principles for guidance on the appropriate use of technology and interactive media as tools in early childhood programs for children whose ages range from birth through eight years. This position statement also establishes the positive potential for using technology and interactive media methods that are based on principles of child development to ensure that the use of technology is developmentally appropriate for young children. Child development and technology professionals also think that developmentally appropriate practices are essential in using technology and interactive media.

Principles and Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Computers are more than tools, because they are part of the children's social and psychological lives. They are also more than games and spreadsheets that are used to determine the way computers affect the children's perception of themselves, of one another and of their relationship with the world (Turkle 2005). Early childhood education teachers need to effectively use, integrate and evaluate technology in developmentally appropriate ways in their classroom (Parette et al 2013; NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012). They should actually assess the worth of using developmentally appropriate technology and interactive media with young children and learn how to use it for effective teaching practices with them. They need to integrate education about both technology and interactive media into the early childhood education program to help young children understand the nature, power and limitations of technology and interactive media.

Effective Classroom Practice

Researchers, families, teachers and early childhood professionals have difficulty integrating technology (eg, electronic and screen-based tools) into the early childhood curriculum and the standard nondigital tools, equipment and manipulatives. Experiences with technology can guide the process for unique learning situations. But technology needs to have an educational component to achieve its full

potential for strengthening children's learning and development. In early childhood programs, the education element usually includes adults being close by, cooperating with children and offering opportunities for peer-to-peer learning to nurture children to obtain the skills they need to be successful in school (McManis and Gunnewig 2012).

Young children need computer experiences that are entertaining and appealing and that promote children's success in learning, development and relationships with both adults and peers. Young children can be given developmentally appropriate design experiences. NAEYC (2012a, b, c) identifies developmentally appropriate and effective classroom practices on how to use technology with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, kindergartners and school-aged children.

- **Infants and toddlers** usually interact with adults. When they play with toys, they usually engage in adult interactions. Children need to converse and interact with an adult when they use technology and interactive media. Young children need to be provided with opportunities to spontaneously discover, manage and explore everything in their environment. At this stage, interaction consists of experimenting with technology tools and interactive media. Push-button switches and controls usually attract infants and toddlers. They need to use technology devices that are safe, sturdy and not easily broken (NAEYC 2012a).
- **Preschoolers and kindergartners** are acquiring a feeling of resourcefulness and creativity. They are inquisitive about their world and learning. In addition, they test their ability to create and express themselves through several types of media (eg, crayons, felt-tip markers, paints and other art materials, blocks, dramatic play materials, miniature life figures) and through creative movement (eg, singing, dancing, using their bodies to communicate ideas). Digital technologies offer another means for them to show their creativity and learning (NAEYC 2012b).
- **School-aged children** are usually learning how to read, write, compute and conduct research. They use books, touch screens, writing instruments and devices to examine scientific and social concepts. As older children and adults use technology tools in their work and home, younger children attempt to imitate this practice, initially through pretend behaviour and realistic play and later by developing proficient skills to use the tools for their personal communication and learning. Innovative web-based technologies allow young children to become producers of

technology and to discover the relevance, incentive and practice of technology devices (NAEYC 2012c).

Technological Benchmarks

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is another professional organization that offers early childhood researchers and professionals principles and guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices on how technology, including electronic and screen-based tools, can best be integrated in the early childhood curriculum next to the traditional nondigital tools, equipment and manipulatives. AAAS (1993) recommends that early childhood educators use various technological benchmarks that are developmentally appropriate: *design and technology*, *design and systems*, and *design and projects in technology*, described below.

Design and Technology

Young children need to engage in design and technology projects. At first, they use an assortment of tools to solve practical problems in relation to a wide range of real-world situations. Their design projects can guide them to manage technology issues even when they lack the understanding of the term *technology*. Before knowing the fundamental concepts, young children concentrate on how to use (a) tools and instruments and (b) practical knowledge to solve problems (AAAS 1993).

Design and Systems

Engineering is the professional field that strongly relates to technology. Engineers use scientific principles to solve realistic problems. Children are able to learn about design and systems when they participate in developmentally appropriate experiences in multiple situations that require them to analyze real situations and gather relevant information, explain problems, create and assess innovative concepts, apply their ideas to specific solutions, and assess and enhance their solutions. Progressively, young children will engage in more complicated projects and learn to use feedback with technological systems when they play games, interact in conversations, operate equipment and use materials. Young children can start with simple concepts and gradually progress to more complicated ones (AAAS 1993).

Children below the age of eight are able to use simple equipment and various materials to design and develop projects. They select projects that are of interest to them and within their abilities. Through proper guidance, young children plan, design, develop, assess and modify their design. After they encounter success with their designs and projects, they usually attain self-assurance and

discover that their next design project is easier, although they also discover that some engineers may be unable to actually develop everything that they design (AAAS 1993)

Design and Projects in Technology

Technology needs to be carefully used. Young children can think critically about technology. Designs and projects can offer young children (kindergarten to Grade 2) opportunities to find solutions to problems, use tools correctly, measure things carefully, make realistic judgments, estimate accurately and communicate clearly. Such projects help young children consider the effects of their creations. Children need to have the autonomy to solve problems and enjoy working on simple projects that need only a simple analysis. Young children are able to use technology to make an effort to improve their world, even though the consequences of their efforts may become complicated and unpredictable. Developing reasonable expectations of the impact of technology is as crucial as technology's capacity for improvement. Technology expands young children's capabilities to transform their world (AAAS 1993).

Children as Design Partners

According to AAAS's Technological Benchmarks (1993) and NAEYC'S *Position Statement on Technology and Interactive Media* (NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012), practical technology can be used with young children in a multimedia setting. Teachers need to search for new technologies and techniques to use in working with young children, including the design process. Young children and teachers need to become coworkers and collaborate in designing technologies. Techniques need to reinforce the design of mobile and social technology that focuses on the continuous interest of children and their quest for meaning. Collaborative inquiry also needs to increase (Guha, Druin and Fails 2013).

Technology is a tool, not a solution. Although it serves young children's individual needs, it does not substitute for human interaction. Young children are able to design Web interfaces (Bilal 2003) and Web portals (Large et al 2003). All design experiences must be developmentally appropriate. Both children and teachers need to participate in developing any design (Bila 2003; Large et al 2003). When teachers use children as design partners, children perceive that teachers respect their intelligence and creativity, which stimulates their interest. In technology, children's developmental needs are taken into account when teachers use responsible, well-considered designs and high-quality content selections (Cooper 2005;

Guha, Druin and Fails 2013). Technological experimentation through play may promote young children's learning development in their use of technology and interactive media.

Young Children's Use of Technology and Interactive Media

Currently, young children live in a world that is immersed in a wide range of technologies. They use these technologies daily, when they join home and community events, prepare for school, participate in classroom activities, and socialize with others. Many, even most, children's commercial toys and entertainment media are technology based. Young children continuously use technology as they engage in developmentally appropriate Web-based interactive games and events. In addition, young children notice that their families frequently use their mobile phones and other handheld devices to watch television programs and movies. Children's observations and interpretations guide them to recognize the role of technology and interactive media in their lives (Parette et al 2013). They have become consumers, creators and distributors of media, tools and technology. Children may be categorized as *digital natives* or *digital immigrants*. According to Prensky (2012), children are considered digital natives if they grew up surrounded by and inundated with digital media. In contrast, digital immigrants are children who have drifted into the new digital realm. Young children live in a world of technology and actively use manipulatives, digital and nondigital technology, and interactive media. The following example shows how a wide range of technologies permeate young children's everyday life experiences.

Seven-year-old Latoya awakens to an alarm clock in the morning and hears the radio playing in the kitchen as her mother prepares breakfast. She picks up a remote control on her nightstand and turns on her television to hear *Sesame Street* while she dresses for school. Her cell phone rings just before she goes to the kitchen, and her friend Shannon reminds her that a new pet is available at Webkinz.com. Latoya dashes to her family computer downstairs, logs on and visits the Web site to see the new pet in the store catalogue and, while there, uses KinzCash to buy new furniture for her current pet's room. She sends her friend Shannon a message in KinzChat to ask if she wants to play a challenge game later in the day.

Later that day, Latoya's younger brother Justin returns from his preschool and immediately logs

onto his account at Kidzui.com, a Firefox extension that provides an Internet environment designed for specifically for children. Clicking on a button to connect him to his MyKidzui page, he pings several friends to say 'hi,' watches as they come online and is delighted to see points awarded to him when he shares some cool websites that he has tagged. Since his teacher conducted a lesson on tiger sharks, Justin wanted to see some sharks in their natural environments. Justin clicks on the Kidzui search feature and types the first few letters of the word 'shark.' Bars appear with options: 'sharks,' 'shark tales,' 'shark coloring page,' 'tiger sharks,' and 'sand sharks.' Each bar is connected to Websites having video and other resources to help Justin gain more information. (Parette et al 2010, 335)

At an early age, young children use advanced technology, although they prefer to use tablets, e-readers, and smartphones (Gutnick et al 2010; Rideout 2011). They also continuously use the Internet. According to Seiter (2005), "The Internet is more like a mall than a library; it resembles a gigantic public relations collection more than it does an archive of scholars" (p 38). In addition, "The World Wide Web is a more aggressive and stealthy marketer to children than television ever was, and children need as much information about its business practices as teachers and parents can give them" (Seiter 2005, 100). Such technologies and media can reinforce children's learning and relationships with others. Young children can be provided with enjoyable and engaging shared experiences that optimize children's ability in their learning, development, and relationship with both adults and peers (NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012).

Families' Use of Technology and Interactive Media

Technology and media are immensely different from those of 15 years ago and are much more prevalent. Children are developing in a world of technology and media that are changing at high speed. Children who are nine months old spend practically an hour a day viewing television or DVDs; five-year-olds beg their parents to allow them to use their iPhones; and seven-year-olds use the computer many times a week to play games, complete their homework or learn what their avatars are up to in their favourite virtual worlds. Television continues to be popular (Rideout 2011) among all children and is found in most families' homes.

Children's Usage Patterns

Television used to be the most recent technology in children's homes. Then videos and computers emerged. Now children are experiencing a rapid shift in the digital age that differs from that of their parents and grandparents. A number of different types of technology devices are found in children's homes and schools. At home, young children frequently use computers and other related technologies. They have different kinds of media: 98 per cent have at least one television set at home, 72 per cent have a computer, 67 per cent have a video player, 44 per cent have game players, 41 per cent have a smartphone, 21 per cent have new media devices such as a video iPod, and 8 per cent have the newest platforms such as an iPad or other tablet device (Rideout 2011). In addition, 42 per cent of children under the age of 8 have a television in their bedroom—30 per cent of infants to 1-year-olds, 44 per cent of 2- to 4-year-olds and 47 per cent of 5- to 8-year-olds (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts 2010). Daily, their families use numerous technologies for different purposes in their lives. Consequently, technology is integrated into young children's school, community and family life. There is a wide range of technology use across families. Several of these technologies can be used to promote young children's learning (Parette et al 2010).

Some families buy computer toys to encourage their children to improve their spelling, arithmetic and eye-hand coordination—but some children use them for a different purpose. Young children may use the computer toys to theorize, hypothesize and develop a method of understanding numerous aspects of the world including fate, life and expectations. Children interpret their world based on what they know best, which is themselves. Since the computer differs and is an innovative kind of entity, young children may think that computers are able to reason and have a mental being, in spite of being simply objects (Turkle 2005).

Family Usage Patterns

Still, families' use of these technologies is unknown. For instance, numerous national surveys indicate that computer and Internet use at home is increasing (US Census Bureau 2012), but there are only a few studies on usage patterns over time among different household members. According to the NPD Group (2009), a leading market research company, families with children whose ages range from 4 to 14 years of age use 11 consumer electronic devices. This suggests that children are devoting a major portion of their time during the day texting from mobile phones, playing video

games, listening to their iPods and checking out websites like Facebook and Webkinz. In 2009, the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) showed that children between the ages of 8 and 18 years spent an hour more with media (7 hours and 38 minutes) than they did in 2004 (6.5 hours). The children were not substituting older media, like television, or music with the time they spent with digital media. In its place, they were multitasking or compressing an extra hour of media use into the 7.5 nonschool hours they had each day, for a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes of media contact (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts 2010). Chesley (2005) examined the use of technology in households over time. She showed that longitudinal usage patterns suggested a trend toward adoption and use of e-mail, the Internet, cell phones and pagers over time. She also found that the ongoing use was stronger for some technologies (e-mail, the Internet) than for others (eg, cell phones, pagers).

Families' Responsibilities

Technology gives families an opportunity to learn and communicate. Practical opportunities in digital media demand a more enthusiastic national discussion about families' duty to help their children use the technological devices that are appropriate for their age group. Takeuchi (2011) assumes that assisting family members to undertake these tasks requires an all-embracing new point of view by producers, the research community and policy makers. These efforts must be well thought out in an era of rapid transformation, to enable families to assume a more important role in planning a stimulating, energetic course for their children's learning success.

Conclusion

Early childhood education programs are progressively using more technology to promote young children's learning (Shillady and Parikh 2012). Experiences with technology can provide young children with extraordinary learning possibilities. Children develop computer skills that can help them learn reading, writing and mathematics concepts (NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012). However, technology requires a developmentally appropriate early childhood education component to help young children learn and develop their technological abilities to promote their learning (McManis and Gunnewig 2012).

Educational Environment

Technology and interactive media can support young children's learning in educational settings.

Debates have emerged about the role of technology in relation to developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), based on the teachers' understanding about (1) how young children develop and learn; (2) their unique strengths, needs, and interests; and (3) their social and cultural setting (NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012).

The NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College (2012) revised the 1996 NAEYC technology position statement titled *Technology in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* (NAEYC 1996) to emphasize its responsibility for DAP in early childhood education classrooms. The position statement from the NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center (2012) on *Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* provides a general description, although it mainly examines principles and practices in relation to present-day technologies (Parette et al 2013). Such principles for developmentally appropriate practices with technology and interactive media offer guidelines to educators and families to be able to make informed, intentional choices and appropriate decisions about if, how and when to use technology and media with young children. These devices should be professionally judged in relation to their contribution to children's learning. Educators and families need to understand that both technology and interactive media should complement, rather than replace, worthwhile early childhood educational experiences (eg, creative play, outdoor activities, social interactions with peers and adults). These important devices must be used purposefully to promote active, hands-on, creative, realistic involvement and to encourage communication with children from different parts of the world.

Technology and interactive media need to focus on young children's active involvement rather than passive, noninteractive uses (NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center 2012). Technology and interactive media have the flexibility to be used in many ways. For example, they can provide young children with opportunities to use photographic and practical experiences to explore their intimate imaginations about their actual world situation. Young children can use media to familiarize themselves with characters, objects and events that help them develop intellectually in a unique and important world. The formal educational setting, the relationship between school and home environment for media literacy, and developmental success for both young children and their families (Alper 2013) need to be considered.

Family Environment

Technology and interactive media can also enhance children's learning and communication in the home environment. A more energetic national discussion about families' commitment to helping their children use the technological tools of their age group can help them determine the opportunities that are available for them in digital media. Producers, the research community and policy makers need to help families undertake these responsibilities, especially in this era of instant transformation when families have assumed major responsibilities in the development of their children's technological abilities. Families are responsible for helping young children both to select media and to anticipate the consequences of their choices (Takeuchi 2011). Therefore, like teachers, it is important that families assess the setting in which digital and nondigital devices and content can improve or obstruct young children's development. They need to use digital and nondigital technologies that support young children's socioemotional, physical, cultural and cognitive development.

Technology and interactive media are everybody's responsibility. Academics, policy makers and early childhood educators need to form alliances to promote current teacher and family practices in technology (Alper, 2013). Early childhood professionals and families all need to become lifelong learners. They need to learn how to use both digital and nondigital devices with children in developmentally appropriate techniques and to choose the best digital device that is accessible to offer children developmentally appropriate experiences.

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The Value of Narrative Inquiry as a Provocation to Learn, Develop and Conceptualize Professional Learning in Early Childhood Education

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agreement on the types of professional learning model that are most effective in transferring new learning to practice. This article examines the use of narrative inquiry as a framework for professional learning. It examines how, through narrative inquiry, a professional learning model was created and how its use brought new perspectives, knowledge and practice to two professionals.

Introduction

Early childhood educators are expected to engage in continuous learning. As the field becomes more complex, higher-quality and different types of professional development experiences (Kuh 2012; Lonigan et al 2011) are necessary. However, there is limited empirical research available to support or guide policy makers, professional associations, employers and employees in selecting or designing professional learning programs that support the process of learning rather than focusing on specific content and outcomes (Webster-Wright 2009). Over the past decade, there has been an increased push for models to be adopted that facilitate the transference of new knowledge and skills to the workplace. This article describes how two colleagues used narrative inquiry as a way to guide their thinking about creating a new professional learning model for early childhood education. Both have taught early childhood education at the diploma and degree levels in college and university settings. They have presented and facilitated at many national and international conferences for early childhood professionals. They have also been virtual and face-to-face coaches and mentors for new and experienced early childhood professionals. They

Abstract

Early childhood education is a complex field of practice. Finding professional learning models that help early childhood professionals to remain current is also complex because of factors such as funding, program philosophies, research, government policies, and individual and staff commitment to practice. While continuous professional learning should increase the quality of programming offered to children, there is little

describe how they used narrative inquiry and stories exchanged through e-mail as a way to bring meaning to their ideas and reflection, which led them to the development of a professional learning model to support early childhood educators.

Why Use Narrative Inquiry as a Professional Learning Model?

Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method, uses a flexible process of studying, examining and bringing meaning to human experiences through storytelling or writing (Meier and Stremmel 2010). Drawing on Dewey's (1938) position that educators examine the past-present-future continuum of experience, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) asserted that individuals' lives are stories that unfold over time with experience, reflection and new meaning. A story "is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (p 477). Narrative inquiry helps educators "pull out narrative threads that hold together the interwoven fabric of past, present and future lives and their personal and professional selves" (Knowles and Cole 2008, 15). It can be used as a way of knowing and a process that helps individuals and groups make sense of their perceptions and understanding about the space, place and the world around us (Bruner 1986, 1996).

Stories can surface when they are encouraged by a peer, coach or mentor through the use of questions such as "Tell me about ..." or "In your opinion ..." asked as a way to relate and connect examples of learning to specific situations (Clandinin, Pushor and Orr 2007). Through the process of sharing experiential stories and analysis of those stories, educators are able to bring meaning to their experience and formulate a broader picture of how it relates to professional learning. Understanding children, families and community requires a continuous examination of the strengths, opportunities and unique characteristics that each bring to the environment. Lifelong learners need to consistently observe, research, reflect upon what they think they are seeing, and try to make sense of what is seen or experienced (Meier and Stremmel 2010) in relation to their points of view, cultural orientation, and personal and professional ways of thinking and knowing. The need to constantly ask questions adds to the reflective process, which in turn offers the possibility for growth (Atkinson 2009). This leads to reconfiguring and redefining

the meaning of the experience, which is expressed in "narrative, revealing, representing, and transforming the organic relation" relative to professional learning (Macintyre Latta and Kim 2010, 139).

Narrative inquiry is much more than just telling stories. It is most powerful when participants have particular kinds of wakefulness or attentiveness to the inquiry and to the experience (Macintyre Latta and Kim 2010). Since narrative inquiry is a method that supports reflecting on and bringing meaning to practice, sharing stories is a way to understand practice. Ideally, when stories are shared they will be constructed and reconstructed. Early childhood professionals tell their stories and become listeners while others tell their stories, creating opportunities for collegial discourse. Discourse leads to newer and deeper questions, exploration of thoughts and ways of knowing, which results in bringing new meaning to practice (Warming 2011).

Narrative Inquiry as a Framework for Professional Development

The use of narrative inquiry has great potential to support early childhood educators in challenging their practice. It gets them to address ideas or practices that may be status quo; it allows them to express their stories on issues that are troubling or causing them to have feelings of disequilibrium; it allows for the sharing of experiences, learning and practices with colleagues. Sharing stories contributes to "Aha!" moments that can lead educators to explore answers to questions or practices with which they have been struggling. These moments become the big ideas that can shape professional practice and create supportive learning communities.

The idea of using narrative inquiry as a framework for professional learning in early childhood education settings supports and encourages professionals to engage in intentional discourse for the purpose of sharing their ideas, examining multiple perspectives and collectively exchanging ways of knowing that will further enhance knowledge creation. The engagement in narrative inquiry at a professional level will illuminate possibilities in everyday practice.

The process of narrative inquiry complements the tenets of professional learning. Professional learning is built on the premise that it be experiential, continuous and collaborative, and that it connect theory to practice and practice to theory. Professional learning supports the social

constructivist theories of Lev Vygotsky, who promoted the notion that professional practice is most effective when learning is viewed as a sociocultural activity that requires continuing learning and experience (Billett 2004), and focuses on *how* early childhood educators learn rather than *what* they learn (Macintyre Latta and Kim 2010). A collective exploratory process increases the likelihood of new learning being transferred to practice (Harris and Chrispeels 2008; Harris and Jones 2010; Webster-Wright 2009) because early childhood education professionals can envision their learning in relation to their philosophy and that of their program, as well as the needs and rights of the children, their space, and the unique factors and cultures within the environment.

Narrative Inquiry in Action— Our Stories

We (two early childhood education professors) used narrative inquiry as a research method to examine perspectives on a professional learning model for the early childhood education field. We began our working/writing relationship by e-mail to take on the challenge of writing a textbook. We had never met in person and were situated in separate provinces. E-mail was initially our venue for collaborative writing and eventually became a place where we engaged in professional dialogue. We created a virtual collaboration and professional learning relationship through the exchange of stories via e-mail. As we began writing together, we adopted a process of using intensive, intentional questioning to start the discourse and to support pondering and moving toward new ways of knowing. New ideas, perspectives and possibilities emerged each time we had free, open dialogue without judgment to opposing views. The question that sparked the narrative inquiry on professional development models for early childhood educators came from one of our experiences presenting multiple workshops at a conference in another province. The subject line of the e-mail was “Why do I need to reconsider and rethink PowerPoint presentations?”

The e-mail storytelling became a safe place to explore ideas, identify knowledge deficits and limitations, and articulate our visions and aspirations. We exchanged opinions, asked for help and explored our queries related to the training, disposition and learning requirements of professionals in the early learning sector at various levels of practice. The narrative that followed the question explored the increasingly uncomfortable

feelings associated with presenter-focused teaching. As teacher educators, we examined the debate on professional development and professional learning, and the questions that ensued framed our discourse. We used the following questions to examine our narratives and develop new conceptualizations for professional learning.

1. Which has the greater alignment to professional learning outcomes, traditional or newer models of professional learning? How do new creations of professional standards, new or revised curriculum frameworks, and changing expectations from governments, families, and the public influence the training, disposition and learning requirements of the learner—and how does that influence training?
2. How will early childhood education professionals respond to new continuous learning requirements in an environment of increased technological access to electronic resources and a variety of learning options? Will that change the perception of some early childhood educators about traditional professional development programs?

Our e-mail exchanges became a venue for us to share ideas, make connections between lived experiences, and determine areas requiring more investigation and research. Our narrative inquiry process was five-pronged: (1) the lead-in question, (2) the initial story, (3) the responding story, (4) next steps for investigation/research and (5) next steps. The individual narratives of the authors became collaborative narratives. As each story was examined, new questions were posed, possibilities explored and new research sought out that would support or offer opposing views. For example, one e-mail story was precipitated from the lead-in question about the usefulness of PowerPoint presentations. Diane wrote

Five workshops in three days, in another province, and I should have returned elated but I am not. I am increasingly questioning the way I present in both my classes at the college and at these types of professional development conferences. I don't want to be the sage on the stage anymore. On the plane returning home, I felt like I hadn't connected, I didn't know the audience and I hadn't taken the time to assess prior knowledge or hear their voice. I think the increasing reliance on PowerPoint presentations may be the reason for my cognitive dissonance. Where do I go from here?

Beverlie responded by writing

You ask a great question—where do you go from here? I think before you can figure that out, there are some core questions that you may wish to

explore. For example, what has changed that you don't want to be the sage on the stage now? Why now? Have you been involved in some new professional development that has influenced you to come to this decision? If you move from your "comfort zone," what might the challenges be and what might the benefits be? How are you going to decide your next step? How might I be able to support you?

Over a three-week period, these questions were responded to, some of them in-depth and others in one to two sentences. What became transparent in the e-mail exchanges was the thinking process required if a person wishes to change her philosophy and practice. For example, we asked and responded to each other about how to start to change one's philosophy. "How do you know if the timing is right? How do you know if you are ready to take the risk? What happens if it is a failure? What might success look like?"

Once we had collaboratively explored these questions, we developed the comfort to take a risk and codevelop a workshop that used PowerPoint. The difference with this PowerPoint was that we developed it as a support for visual learners rather than as a core tool to deliver our address. Together we used storytelling, questioning, examples and scenarios as a strategy to explore our topic and, more important, to engage the audience.

As we reflected upon the process, we recognized that by using a narrative inquiry process, we were engaging in individual exploration, collaborative exploration, and individual and collective learning on professional learning models. As a result, the data for this study was collected from reviewing and examining the e-mail exchanges that had occurred over an 18-month period and focused on professional learning.

Results

The narratives documented prompted us to examine beliefs, perspectives and positions that we individually had documented related to our positions on learning models for early learning professionals. By examining our shared experiences in designing and implementing a variety of professional development offerings and systematically comparing and contrasting those experiences, feelings, perspectives and discoveries, we were able to examine our disequilibrium about if and how early learning professionals transferred new information gained from workshops to practice. We questioned the usefulness and effectiveness of workshops, seminars and conferences as the main strategy of professional development. As the stories became

more in-depth, the connections and themes led to a rigorous thought and analysis process. We "talked it out" as a way to make sense of the stories. We examined e-mails to determine story themes and then interwove salient points with the array of changes occurring in the early learning sector. The themes were compared to the current research on professional development. Our reciprocal reflexivity led to narrative unity (MacIntyre and Dunne 2002), collective exploration, thinking and continuous discourse. This reflective approach (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000) provided a lens through which we were able to analyze our stories, interpret the key messages and position our findings within the research literature. This led to a re-visioning process that brought meaning to the stories and sparked more questions about professional development that further expanded the possibilities. An explicit professional learning model emerged from the dialogic relationship and the sharing of stories (Strong-Wilson 2006).

A Model of Professional Learning Using Narrative Inquiry Processes

The quality of early learning programs correlates with the continuous learning in which early learning professionals participate (Meier and Stremmel 2010). Changes to practice are effective when a professional learning model provides participants with a high degree of ownership about the strategy for learning and the intended outcomes (Harris and Jones 2010). Individuals and groups benefit when they determine their own learning strategy and how the change process will occur.

We propose a professional learning model that uses the tenets of narrative inquiry as a way to facilitate professional learning. The model presented in Figure 1 involves three revolving wheels that represent three types of practice: *best*, *next* and *ethical*. When we shared stories and used a narrative inquiry process to make sense of our professional learning experiences, we recognized that the process of meaning-making required the wheels to revolve in unison, but not necessarily always at the same speed or frequency (Meier and Stremmel 2010). The three wheels provided a metaphor to explain our shared experience.

In our quest to find a better model for professional learning, we realized that each wheel is ineffective on its own. For example, the first wheel, representing *ethical practice*, involves the application of ethics to everyday encounters. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) described the process of



Figure 1: A Model of Continuous Professional Learning

ethical encounters for educators as effectively making decisions every day based on what is best within their own contexts. Deliberating together about ethical practice prompted discussions about the professional learning we have been asked to deliver to others. Within our contexts, we had to determine if we truly believed that professional learning was most effective when the model of delivery was learner centred and interactive, and offered follow-up with the participants. If so, could we ethically accept invitations to deliver workshops or conference presentations that did not have those elements embedded in them? Our stories led us to make conscious decisions to pay attention to new research on teaching and learning, our colleagues, and the dialogue within the community network. We needed to make ethical decisions based on our own practice, which involved consideration beyond the wheel of *best practice*.

Best practice reflects knowledge creation from traditional sources. Before arriving at new ideas and conceptualizations, knowledge about what experts feel constitutes best practice is required, but not taken without question. With “the reconceptualist discourse” questioning “assumptions of universality and the use, for example, of terms such as ‘best’ and ‘appropriate’ that suggest singularity of response in a diverse and complex world” (Pacini-Ketchabaw

and Pence 2005, 5), there is a rationale for a cycle of best, next and ethical practice. This continuous professional learning model supports the postmodern view of questioning what is dominant. The model requires professionals to have a basic knowledge of the dominant theories so that they may challenge the concept of best practice, through examining and understanding what is considered “best” in their own practice. For example, our stories revealed that when there were shared experiences during workshops and conferences that were learner centred rather than focused on the presenter, participants felt the experience to be more applicable to practice. We then drew upon the work of Polly and Hannafin (2010), who determined that teachers are increasingly motivated when there is professional development pedagogy that “builds on prior knowledge, aligns to their personal interests and beliefs, and encourages ownership of learning” (p 563). This reinforced how narrative inquiry and stories support meaning making.

Our inquiry solidified that learning can occur via presentations, but there is a need to scaffold learning from workshops into a process of learning. Traditional delivery models allow for information to be received and create knowledge, but in order to make the cycle complete, dialogue among colleagues with a variety of educational backgrounds

and experiences is necessary. Such strategies help to formulate the stories and processes required to advance the learners' professional knowledge and to visualize how to transfer new knowledge to practice. When we shared stories of experiences, we realized that the conversations that occurred during opportunities for engagement helped to put the presenter's content into context and helped the learners focus on how the information presented could be applied to practice.

The third wheel outlined in Figure 1 involves application and leads to *next practice*. By building on the professional knowledge gained from the examination of best practice, a foundation is formed that creates a baseline for creative thinking. Creative thinking leads to the further exploration of how big ideas can advance theories and practices in the context of relationships within a community of practice. *Next practice* is the continual search for what is possible. In our case, the searching process brought forth stories and concerns about the traditional professional development model, which led to examining and creating a new vision for professional learning. Our practices were changed when professional development was scaffolded to the *next* level. The term *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976) has been used to describe the transition from interpersonal to intrapersonal knowledge. In our experience, social media provided the provocation for professional learning and development because it provided new information that did not fit our existing thinking. New technologies opened up new possibilities for active learning and the sharing of professional knowledge. As part of a social construct engaged in the intertwining of social and individual growth, we experienced crossing the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky 1978) when we challenged each other to learn through the nontraditional platforms offered by social media. Our shared learning led to contemplating this question: How can we help others see the benefits and realize the potential of professional learning networks? In our contexts, the sharing of knowledge gained through the exploration of the big idea that social media could be a catalyst for professional learning resulted in cognitive dissonance. When we found ourselves embracing social media as a significant form of professional learning and a construct for creating learning communities, new information collided with old ways of thinking. When we took charge of our own professional learning and actively engaged with new technologies, we realized the disequilibrium caused from crossing to another level of thinking produced tension. We embraced the disequilibrium and the process of the wheels revolving and

evolving. This led us to *next practice*. Now the opportunities to expand professional resources and to share with others are infinite. For us, social media has provided a new way to learn within a community and to extend learning opportunities to others.

What Is Next?

Learning is active, not passive. Sustainable professional growth can occur when using models such as narrative inquiry because of the multiple perspectives that educators share. Narrative inquiry-based professional learning models support locally situated places of learning and value the professional as an ethical practitioner who makes professionalism visible. The professional is no longer "an autonomous subject seeking objective truth" (Dahlberg and Moss 2005, 13). The new professional is evolving to be an "ethical actor in relationships with others and located in a particular context" (Dahlberg and Moss 2005, 13). Professionals move through the cycle of continuous professional learning, demonstrating ethical practice and new knowledge creation, working toward the possibilities that emerge from next practice.

Developing working relationships that cultivate a safe place to tell stories, examine ideas, perspectives, and practices, make sense of stories, and extract the new knowledge that evolves from the stories can create powerful professional learning experiences (Gallacher 1997). Stories from differing roles and experiences as trainers, coaches, consultants and facilitators help participants to challenge each other's perspectives, thinking processes, experiences, beliefs and values in relation to theoretical frameworks and practices. This kind of dialogue has the potential to provide a more complex and comprehensive understanding of the pieces of new knowledge or "Aha!" moments that are being formulated (Sheridan et al 2004).

As we reflected on our learning processes, examined research on professional learning and amalgamated our experiences into the model, we determined that the model presented is most powerful with three actions present. First, professional learning works effectively when participants are committed to taking an active and engaged role in determining their professional learning goals, objectives and strategies and to assisting others in focusing on areas that require further exploration and change.

Second, there is the need for systematic and reflective practice (Connelly and Clandinin 2006). This complex process encourages early learning professionals to examine their practice from both

implicit and explicit frameworks. Reflective practice helps participants to examine core attributes of their practice, engage in problem posing and examine how errors in the past become opportunities for the future.

The third action is engaging in a relational–dialogical conversation. Relational–dialogical conversations are built on mutual curiosity, whereby the participants use dialogue as a springboard for new learning about issues, theories, ideals or practices that are being explored. The interactive, interpretive process of social discourse extends ideas in an active, intentional and creative format that allows for the emergence of new conceptualization and equilibrium (Waite-Stupiansky 1997).

Educators, coaches, mentors and facilitators of learning benefit from using narrative inquiry processes as a way to question past, present and future practices. As each question is answered, we are faced with more to explore—such as what supports do early learning professionals, organizations, government agencies and policy makers need in order to examine new strategies for professional learning? How will collaborative partnerships continue to provide a venue to interact and modify individual and collective knowledge?

Conclusions and Future Directions

We are convinced that narrative inquiry expands the depth and breadth of learning among colleagues and increases the amount of new learning being transferred to practice. In considering the relationship between early childhood professionals engaging in narrative inquiry, continuous learning and quality programming for young children, this paper has outlined how narrative inquiry through stories led to formulating a new interactive professional learning model. Narrative inquiry not only brought meaning to stories, it resulted in developing a professional learning model that now needs to be used in a variety of settings to gain empirical evidence about the effectiveness of the model.

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Teaching for Enthusiasm

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Abstract

In this article, the author focuses on the importance of teaching enthusiasm. The article focuses upon two questions: (1) What do enthusiastic children look like? and (2) Why would enthusiasm make them better learners? He then reviews his experiences, as both a father and a teacher, to outline characteristics of enthusiastic children. Finally, he offers ten practical suggestions to help teachers create a classroom environment and pedagogy that would be hospitable to engaging enthusiastic children within classrooms.

Nadia Torres was into it, and could not be stopped. On June 2, 2013, five years old, Nadia was asked to leave a Providence, Rhode Island, theatrical performance of *Beauty and the Beast* for humming too loudly. What makes Nadia so special is that she has a rare chromosomal abnormality that prevents her from speaking. Nadia had, to the distress of others, enthusiastically engaged in the music by “squealing and giggling and humming” (Rios 2013).

Obviously, there are two sides to this story—and a child’s enthusiasm really can bump into others’ enjoyment of a performance. My goal here is not to suggest otherwise or to castigate those who wanted a five-year-old removed. What struck my attention is how enthusiastically the child was engaged; and, in contrast, how many children are not so engaged. Perhaps I respond as a former teacher who taught many less enthusiastic children. Perhaps I respond as a father of a five-year-old myself—a child who, while riding her two-wheeler, says hi to every dog walker or mother with a baby or jogger who passes her and tells them she can ride her bike now, without training wheels. For both reasons, as a

teacher and a father, I am interested in children’s learning engagement and their enthusiasm for such engagement.

In this paper, I will consider enthusiasm. Living with two young daughters of my own (one seven years of age and the other five), I believe enthusiastic children will engage learning in optimal ways and, unless forcibly stopped, will actually learn fully. In fact, I believe there are only a few things we can do that will stop enthusiastic children from learning. Sadly, however, I believe teachers sometimes do those few things that cripple children’s enthusiasm. So, here I want to consider the characteristics of children’s enthusiasm and how teachers might support it.

What Is Enthusiasm?

Enthusiasm comes from the Greek, where it meant “possessed by a god.” Enthusiastic people are, the Greeks thought, inspired by powerful forces. In my experience, this is also true of teachers. The very best teachers I have had—the most effective—are inspired and inspiring. Indeed, most would argue that enthusiasm is valuable for all of us; and, when applied to discussions of teaching and learning, enthusiastic teaching and learning are stimulating, animated, energetic, engaged and active.

Obviously, enthusiastic classrooms are more stimulating than dull classrooms. Although educational researchers have studied enthusiasm, most research has focused on the impact of teacher enthusiasm on student achievement. Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2003), for example, report that effective teachers are enthusiastic and warm, and have a sense of humour; Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf try to link such personality traits to student achievement. But my searches have found scarce educational research focusing on how or why children show enthusiasm and how enthusiasm might affect their learning. What, for example, do enthusiastic children look like? And why would enthusiasm make them better learners?

These questions are my focus. Let me begin by noting my own experiences as a father and a teacher. First, enthusiastic children are positive about themselves and others. They celebrate their own achievements without seeming jealous about others' achievements. They love engaging, are self-motivated and encourage others. They are not afraid to tackle new things. Without fanfare, they set high personal expectations—they simply believe they can do things; and they do these things until they get them right, or until they move on. They are naturally visionary and foster their own senses of self. They listen actively and communicate clearly because they care.

Their enthusiasm for sharing what they learn supports and encourages others. They envision and seek the big picture and are effective systems thinkers. Two things seem to motivate their enthusiasm for learning: (1) they set their own goals, make plans to meet them and get there; and (2) they enjoy working together, which helps everyone around them by naturally engaging the diversity of others. Their focus on having fun employs the tools of 21st-century learning and covers the curriculum in authentic ways.

Children's enthusiasm is contagious. Enthusiasm makes them extraordinarily fun (and sometimes tiring) to be around. Enthusiastic children play hard at their work. They do more and better than we expect—they surprise us. Their enthusiasm fuels creativity, and they are full of ideas and complete projects in imaginative ways. Enthusiastic children pull you into their worlds, which are full of wonderful possibilities.

One thing enthusiastic children are not. They are not negative. Perhaps it is important to speak a bit about negativity. A biblical parable tells of a man from whom a demon is exorcised.¹ But the man who was once possessed does nothing, remains empty, and the cast-out demon gathers seven demonic friends who all come back to repossess the now empty man. Life is worse than before. For me, the parable's message is that hearts cannot be emptied of negative affliction; instead, negativity is squeezed out by filling one's heart with positives so that no room for negativity remains.

Enthusiasm is like that. It fills one's heart, leaving no room for negativity. But, when enthusiasm dies, negativity spreads to hamper everyone's

performance and choices. In our own recent research on instructional leadership in schools (Parsons and Beauchamp 2011), teachers told us that it wasn't hard work that killed their enthusiasm—it was negativity. Enthusiasm pushes us in positive directions. It fuels our engines. Children who love what they're doing usually perform at their highest level. That's the way I have seen it work.

Supporting Enthusiastic Children

My own experience suggests that enthusiasm is personally and corporately helpful. That is, one person's enthusiasm can pump up the entire community. Enthusiasm helps us all, and schools especially could do with more of it. As a teacher educator, my question remains how we, as teachers, can create classroom environments hospitable to building enthusiastic children. Below, I offer ten suggestions for teaching in ways that support enthusiasm.

Suggestion One: Teach actively. In my experience, activity encourages creativity and active pedagogies create environments where enthusiasm can flourish. I have seen the cycle: enthusiasm generates creativity and creativity triggers enthusiasm. As teachers, encourage students to explore their creativity. Support classroom conversations in which children explore their curiosity about others and share their own lives. Be innovative. Try new things and evaluate activities on how they generate children's enthusiasm. Teach outside the box. My experience suggests that encouraging creativity effectively builds enthusiasm.

Suggestion Two: Allow children to make some curriculum decisions. Children who initiate ideas become dedicated enthusiasts. All of us, including children, promote what we are interested in and passionate about. Passion builds enthusiasm, which engages learning. In my experience, teamwork is enhanced when curriculum and pedagogy choices are shared with children. "These are our goals; how do you believe we should get there?" is a leadership question children might engage. Children who lead also become more enthusiastic. They are sure to surprise us with original ideas as they co-create classroom life instead of watching it from a distance.

¹Matthew 12:43-45 New International Version (NIV)

⁴³ When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.

Suggestion Three: Teach children to help others succeed. Helping others is not only the right way to live, it motivates. Working together teaches children that others' ideas help the team. When I watch children play together, they naturally cover for each other—those less able in some areas allow others to lead in those areas, waiting for times when they might lead. I have never once seen a child call out another for a lack of ability; together, they seem to achieve their goals. Helping others teaches children to see both others' needs and others' abilities as they build community together.

Suggestion Four: Teach children to be grateful for the gifts others offer. Often we teach children to refuse what others offer so as to become more self-reliant or independent. Being grateful erodes self-reliance. It recognizes and appreciates others. It tells children that we all have gifts, but alone we don't possess all the gifts we need. It teaches children to benefit from others and, in return, to share our gifts to help others. Being grateful builds community, and community engages others' creative diversities. Being grateful spurns hierarchies: hierarchies never fully use others' diverse abilities; they foster loneliness. Expressing gratitude helps us accept small things that make life better—including communities of sharing.

Suggestion Five: Teach children to accept and talk about change. Knowing that life changes and that plans, desires and abilities constantly evolve can help children confidently accept change as natural. As children come to understand that they grow and learn every day, and that such growth brings new ideas and insights, enthusiasm is generated for what might be coming. Help children increase their own growth and awareness of ability and insight. Children who become metacognitive about their own growth accept the rewards and problems of change more easily. Regularly looking backward and forward to see where they were and where they now are can be encouraging.

Suggestion Six: Talk with children about what they love. Enthusiastic children do what they love. They engage in hobbies, crafts, playing—everything. Allow children to share their interests. Engage in regular conversations in which children talk about why they love doing what they love doing. Have them write about or show what brings them joy. Respond by encouraging and shaping their passions. As teachers, we can publicly and privately support children's passions by caring that these exist—seeking conversations about how their work is going. As a father, it takes very little to encourage my girls to show me what they create. My interest

or lack of interest either builds enthusiasm for their projects or erodes it.

Suggestion Seven: Teach children to be proud, but not haughty. Encourage children to talk about what they do well or are learning—turn activity into success. Whatever you believe children should appreciate—creativity, work, kindness—help them engage in it with pride. Offer a stage where children talk about success with their peers, school and family and where they hear others share their successes. Pride encourages joyful enthusiasm. Over my years as a researcher, I gained an insight to guide data collection: we are human, and humans' favourite topics are themselves. When children talk about what brings them pride, they build the enthusiasm to continue.

Suggestion Eight: Laugh. For children, laughter means growth and helps build positive frames of mind. Laughter exorcises the negativity that slaughters enthusiasm. Laughter keeps a glass half full and actually turns glasses into jugs. Laugh at success. Laugh at mistakes. Laugh with others. Laugh at yourself. Laughter finds positive lessons in what might seem bad. Laughter drowns problems in a tsunami of enthusiasm that helps children move toward their goals. Laughter helps children remain open to joy and helps them learn to know when others need compassion.

Suggestion Nine: Actively engage children in problem solving. Working transparently to solve class problems (action research for children) teaches children that they have the power to do things. Enthusiastic children often need little persuasion, but without space enthusiasm can ebb. When problem solving with children, hold reasonable expectations. Impossible expectations erode momentum and enthusiasm. But realistic expectations, a gentle attitude about reaching goals and a regular look at progress keep enthusiasm high. Finally, because problem solving can be difficult, teaching children patience helps them remain enthusiastic.

Suggestion Ten: Enjoy teaching moments. Enthusiastic children live fully, enjoying the now. They are fully present, unconsciously self-confident about their place in the universe—as it exists right now. Enthusiastic children's energy helps them turn today's idea into reality. Enthusiastic children take risks and finish the projects they start. They faithfully follow the currency of their hearts' convictions and their brains' ideas.

Summary

Davis (2004), in his book *Creativity Is Forever*, offers a number of characteristics from studies of

creative people. These include independence, self-confidence, risk taking, high energy, spontaneity, curiosity, humour, playfulness, idealism, consideration and enthusiasm. There is a certain charisma to enthusiasm. Others are drawn to the high energy and invigoration enthusiasm brings. We simply feel better when we hang around enthusiastic people. My experience suggests this is true of both children and adults.

Enthusiastic children are dedicated, engaged community builders. They clearly envision goals, seldom become distracted, and engage dreams. Enthusiastic children are not paralyzed by fear, but overcome fear by unconscious strength. Enthusiastic children make choices. Something inside guides their actions, and their road maps may detour but move ever ahead. They find good company; they distinguish between unimportant and important and can turn the unimportant into the important. They avoid irrelevance. Their creativity inspires. They use resources to realize their potentials. Enthusiastic children unconsciously understand how dreams and passions fuel personal growth and organize the universe to fulfill their needs.

Enthusiastic children focus on the good. They emphasize what they can do rather than what they can't. They find the gift in difficulties. They are positive. Enthusiastic children naturally seek goals, discovering and organizing life around their gifts. They offer their talents to others and, by doing so, better their environments, add value to life and live happily. They are the kind of people we need more of. And whatever we can do to encourage them in schools, we should.

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The Emergence of Cultural Narratives Rationalizing Play and Childhood

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The Disappearance of Play and Its Rationalization: An Introduction

It wasn't until my first month of teaching in South Korea, in early 2009, that I heard the term *helicopter parents* to describe the kind of hyper-involved and ambitious parenting that typified the burgeoning middle classes' parenting style. While I understood then that there was a cultural and historical dimension in parents' desire to see their children excel academically, linguistically and athletically that made it more prominent in the South Korean context, the same obsession is present in Western (particularly North American) society as well. In *The Price of Privilege* (2006), Levine describes helicopter parents as physically "hyper-present" but psychologically absent. In a 2011 interview, *Psychology Today* editor-at-large Hara Marano identified the middle-class pursuit of image and status as commensurate "with the changes seen in parenting, play, and pushing children to achieve in ways that are designated by parents and that enhance parental status" (Marano and Skenazy 2011, 435). Admittedly, in South Korea, certain practices would be regarded as excessive by North American standards, but they are often justified by South Korean parents within the historical context of South Korea's rapid ascension to global economic powerhouse since the end of the Korean War, in 1953. For example, some parents' efforts "to achieve English fluency have even gone to the extreme of having children's tongues snipped surgically for better English

pronunciation" (Demick 2002; Park 2002). Optimistically, however, some recent trends in Asian parenting indicate that the younger generation of parents, born in the 1980s, who themselves were pushed to learn piano, math and English, do "appreciate their children learning creativity, team work and problem-solving" (*The Economist* 2013, 72).

However, my motivation for writing this paper is not to critique the rise of the South Korean middle class or to focus on second (English) language learning, but to explore the ways in which parenting and schooling are changing to regulate or mandate play-as-learning, which, paradoxically, excludes play from childhood. As Wood (2010) points out, play is "intrinsically bound with the contemporary politics of education because it is subject to regulation and management" (p 16). Through "appropriate techniques of organization" (Ball 1995, 262), macro-policy guidance assumes that "the complexities and paradoxes of play not only can be managed but can also be neutralized to produce defined learning outcomes" (Wood 2010, 16). The anecdotal reference to my time in South Korea is meant to serve as an experiential starting point, from which I conceptualize this trend in curriculum development, that could serve as a warning to parents elsewhere of the excesses possible in the age of school accountability and overprotective parenting aimed at securing a place for their children in an ultracompetitive world. In exploring what I see as the academization of childhood curricula and the sanitization and/or overregulation of play, I aspire to generate a homage to play and childhood, not a history or requiem. While acknowledging that there is a sociopolitical dimension to the changes under way in the cultural narratives surrounding play and childhood in society, I will not engage in such analysis. Thus, on this matter, I feel it sufficient to say that when educational systems denounce the value of free play and promote particular types of play that contribute

to academic knowledge, they ensure by extension “the profitability of the cultural capital of the dominant” (Mills and Gale 2007, 435). This essay attempts to place the development of such narratives in historical context.

An exploration of contemporary conceptualization of childhood reveals that there are also preferred kinds of play associated with childhood; that there are settings in which this play is supposed to happen; and that children, childhood, child’s play and education are tightly interwoven into cultural narratives that espouse a peculiar blend of sustained management (by adults) over the messy, dangerous and unproductive aspects of child-initiated play, growth and exploration. In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate how the experience of childhood is affected by popular metanarratives aimed at stifling children’s rough-and-tumble and free play through academic learning promotion, and to posit that safety, micromanagement and a culture of surveillance confine the developing human person in a way that is contrary to the developmental objectives that (Western) society holds dear and promotes in early childhood education.

While the issue of defining play is largely polemical and out of the scope of this essay, it is important to say that the terms *play*, *free play* and *unstructured play* will be used interchangeably to denote an activity that “is incompletely functional in the context in which it appears; is spontaneous, pleasurable, rewarding or voluntary; differs from other more serious behaviours in form; ... is repeated, but not in abnormal or unvarying stereotypic form ... and is initiated in the absence of acute or chronic stress” (Burghardt 2011, 17). Also, I firmly support the idea that through “play, children create new learning experiences, and these self-created experiences enable them to acquire social, emotional, and intellectual skills they could not acquire in any other way” (Elkind 2008, 1).

A Brief Historiography of Play and Leisure

It is necessary to situate cultural narratives surrounding play and childhood within a historical context in order to understand their origins, contemporary interpretations and trajectory. In his essay “Pedagogy of Play,” Farné (2005) traces the fundamental changes occurring at the beginning of the Modern Age in Europe associated with “the *discovery of play* as the emblematic index of the ‘discovery of childhood’” (p 169; italics in original), and the subsequent investment in play as an

educational device promoted by John Locke, Maria Montessori and Friedrich Fröbel. This shift represents the unresolved inherent tension between play, associated with pleasure common to both play and leisure, and learning, associated with mandatory duty common to both learning and work.

Cross (2008) argues that in more recent history, children’s play and children’s toys have shifted from improvised games to commercialized toys and structured play, and that increased “American affluence has made it possible for each family member to have an increasingly large array of personal play ‘tools’” (p 26). This shift has been accompanied by two auxiliary effects as well: the universalization of play, toys and leisure activities and (conversely but simultaneously) the possibility for individualization of play, toys and leisure as social markers of class taste. Farné (2005) observes that “nowadays, it is emblematic to notice how our daily life is characterized by the presence of objects which are similar to toys for their dimensions, shapes, colours, and textures: cell phones, mini cars, watches, household objects etc. show a trend as a sort of ‘Toysation’ of reality, therefore suggesting that the toy-format has a special communicative power” (p 175).

The reasons for this shift are numerous. First, technological advances have made the consumption of leisure activities and commodities more readily available to a larger public while, at the same time, they have freed people from labour-related time constraints and enabled people to enjoy “time off” in different ways than they could in previous historical periods. Second, the differentiation of public, labour and social spaces has led to the increase of sedentary and personalized forms of entertainment. Finally, and most important in North America, the shift has been epistemic and cultural, described by Cataluccio (2004) as the “Peter Pan Syndrome” or “cult for childhood”—a process of contamination between adult and children’s cultures. The negation of free play as a valuable and desirable human activity, and the neoliberal ethos of market-logic have discredited the viability of pleasure for pleasure’s sake, shifting the onus to academic performance and accountability. Within this context, the academic focus in early childhood education and the accompanying cultural shift to mandate and regulate sanitized forms of play as part of schooling can be seen as originating from this trend in Western society.

Here, I would like to contextualize Cross’s analysis and resituate the importance of his work in relation to this paper’s thesis by emphasizing the idea that “societies have maintained frameworks—sometimes involving carefully protected times and

spaces—to encourage playful behaviors” (Henricks 2008, 162). This both posits *and* answers the question of why, given this social predisposition to qualify play as part of childhood, play is disappearing or being intentionally curbed. As articulated by Farné (2005), the inherent contradiction rests in that “on the one hand, play is considered as a ground on which adults intervene by building paths, materials, structures that give it an additional value, on the other hand, due to a pedagogical project, that very ground is preserved as natural as possible assuming that this is its true value” (p 170).

If we are to believe Jean-François Lyotard (1979) that we are in a postmodern crisis marked by an incredulity towards metanarratives, then, indeed, we can see the increased heterogeneity of leisure activities, play and toys not only as a by-product of increasing technological capability and consumer culture, but as an attempt by individuals and groups to reclaim and inhabit cultural narratives represented by their leisure and lifestyle choices. In this sense, contemporary cultural narratives that constrain play and commodify childhood as something to be preserved, protected and mediated are symptomatic of the middle classes’ historical struggle to move upward while protecting their investments and their children from the corrupting and uncontrollable influence of the distasteful, atavistic and autotelic tendencies of the lower classes.

The Academic Focus

Given the complex historical confluence of social, political, religious and philosophical forces that have led to this point, it seems very much to be the case that play is not disappearing, but being rebranded and modified into a purposeful activity. Speaking to the way in which the physicality of play has been discouraged at large and redirected into the semiprofessional or organized sports arena, Sheets-Johnstone (2003) calls for a “distinction between play and competition or aggression” (p 412). While the semiprofessionalization of children’s sports may seem to constitute a separate phenomenon from the academization of play, I argue that the two are closely interrelated because they originate from the same cultural motif to operationalize play into a productive activity.

The idea of operationalizing childhood and making children the agents of social ideologies is not a new one. During industrialization, childhood was not an unfettered and carefree period of life, but often involved long and dangerous labour regimens for most who lived in urban centres. It was the 20th century that really witnessed the rise of

ideology-driven purposing of childhood. The contemporary perversion of play has created “children ... [who] crave and demand explicit instructions, prescriptions even because they (the kids) are so programmed to achieve success that they are anxious about failing” (Chudacoff 2012, 405). By briefly referring to the definition of play outlined in the introduction of this paper, we see that academic intensive early childhood curricula and organized “sports, which involve practise regimens, special training and other quasi-utilitarian components ... are [closer] to work” than to play (p 403).

More specifically related to the issue of play outside of organized sports, the cultural focus on academic performance and school readiness has led to the publication of numerous “scientific studies [which] affirm that academic and social experiences in the preschool years are associated with school readiness and later school outcomes” (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff 2013, 104). Play pedagogies arising from such work aim to discredit the value of unstructured play, favouring instead structured or guided play, while paradoxically acknowledging that “an unfortunate recent trend is the growing prevalence of preschool curricula and testing materials that are oriented solely toward content-focused education” (ibid).

In addition to the shifting focus on school readiness in academic literature, there is a growing body of pseudoscience that has created a market for itself with parents (and educators) eagerly buying trendy books, toys and philosophies geared to accelerating their children’s (and students’) academic success and cognitive growth. This has unfortunately spawned a growing number of neuromyths, defined as “simplistic generalizations about neuroscience’s application to education” (Clement and Lovat 2012, 534). Pedagogies spawning from these neuromyths as attempts to integrate neuroscience into the classroom include catchy concepts like “brain-based ... , brain compatible ... , brain friendly ... , or brain targeted ... instructional approaches” (Alferink and Farmer-Dougan 2010, 46.). Other popularized and marketed product lines include “Brain Gym ... and VAK learning styles. The label of neuromyths has also been applied to well-known theories as Multiple Intelligences ... and Emotional Intelligence” (Clement and Lovat 2012, 541). While I am convinced that emerging products, theories and pedagogies are honestly well intentioned by their producers and marketers, and that most parents naturally want the best for their children, the fact remains that “critical thinking and analytic skills appear to have their own critical

period of development in later childhood and attempts to teach such skills in early childhood have met with failure” (Bossé 1995; Schoenfeld 2006).

Nicolopoulou (2010) argues that “[one] impetus for the growing academization of preschool is the recognition that young children’s acquisition of literacy is critical to their long-term learning and school success” (p 3). Still, given this knowledge, it is radically presumptuous to overburden children with parental ambition in the form of academic achievement through the guise of scientific pedagogical theory, when literacy, numeracy and other cognitive skills “can be fostered more effectively by play-based practices that engage children’s interest and initiative” (ibid). It is noteworthy that amidst the plethora of competing pedagogies relating to early childhood education, budding theories that try to locate play on a free-structured continuum are problematic. In the case of play, “it is difficult to conceptualize, much less operationalize, emergent phenomena ... If anything, the effect has been to trivialize emergence as either too obvious or trite to be theoretically useful, or too complicated to be practically useful” (Mihata 1997).

Still, there is great social and political momentum in pedagogical ideas that favour containing and structuring play, with some even advocating for its total exclusion. “This emphasis on more didactic, academic, and content-based approaches to ... education comes at the expense of more child-centered, play-oriented, and constructivist approaches” (Nicolopoulou 2010, 1). As Wood (2010) cautions, even when the educational policy makers institutionalize play as learning-through-play policies, there is an expectation that play deliver particular educational outcomes. “In order for play to deliver educational outcomes, there are common caveats within these policy documents which state the pedagogical conditions under which play can and should happen, including informed adult involvement; planning and organization; well-resourced environments (indoors and outdoors); sustained periods of time for play; adult observation and assessment of play” (p 17).

The point that such policies overlook is that play is natural and beneficial to the development of our species. As Skenazy has noted, “play is a supervitamin for cognitive development” (Marano and Skenazy 2011, 439). Moreover, given how behaviourally complex play is and how it organically facilitates moral, behavioural and cognitive development in *Homo sapiens*, it appears abundantly clear that legislating curricular parameters around it in such a way as to replace or exclude it is premature.

The Culture of Safety

Let’s turn to the emerging trend of preoccupation with safety in our society and how it creates a deadening of the human body by confining its movement within artificial and sterile spaces. Here, play is also being stifled, but not through academization or an obsession with growth and development. Instead, an interventionist preference and legalistic culture of paranoia have influenced teachers in schools and architects of parks and playgrounds to designate and design safe playing and play spaces, respectively. In a world operating under the guidance of such cultural narratives, play becomes reduced to the “enaction of the mechanistic, linear, and hierarchical metaphors” (Thom 2012, 67). In speaking to what he feels is a state of moral panic concerning the safety of children and the debate between nature and nurture, Mechling (2008) offers sage advice when he writes, “[as] is true in so many things regarding children’s play, the best things adults can do is leave the kids alone” (p 208).

The first aspect of play being curtailed by contemporary narratives that promote safety is rough-and-tumble play. The physicality of the rough-and-tumble qualifier can appear in structured play and in free play, manifesting in sports or improvised imaginative scenarios. What is significant about this aspect of play is that it has an incredibly beneficial developmental role in socialization. There exists the very intuitive notion that the physicality of play is the intrinsic reward of bodily movement. Movement for the sake of movement and human touch seem primordially ingrained in our bio-organic constitution as social animals, so to deny them seems to violate the very essence of our material existence as organisms on this planet. On this matter, Sheets-Johnstone (2003) has suggested that physical contact in play is responsible for developing our sense of empathy and, by extension, morality as social animals; “that in learning our bodies and learning how to move ourselves, we first learn the vulnerabilities of being a body—our own vulnerabilities and the vulnerabilities of others in our movements and interactions with them” (p 412). From her perspective, playing and playing with each other in physical ways are ontogenetically, phylogenetically and philosophically foundational. Nicolopoulou (2010) too, sees it essential to promote what she terms “socioemotional skills” (p 3) like social competence, self-regulation, cooperation and social understanding through play and physicality. Similarly, Marano advocates teacher and parent nonintervention in instances where play becomes verbally or physically aggressive, stating

that “[hyping] the dangers of bullying and seeing it in every negative interaction is a mistake that reflects the general mistrust of childhood and the misunderstanding of the social experiences of children” (Marano and Skenazy 2011, 430). For Marano, the principal argument is that learning to be assertive is a valuable and necessary part of life quite distinct from learning to be aggressive. Here, we come to the heart of the matter regarding contemporary metanarratives surrounding play and safety, and tendencies to conflate similar yet fundamentally different aspects of childhood and play. “In the search for safety and in a desire to avoid confrontation with parents and prescriptive agencies ... [we are] in danger of taking all the fun and spontaneity out of playtime” (Thomson 2007, 54). Competition and assertion have been demonized as aggression, while risk has been odiously conflated with hazard.

Indeed, Pellis and Pellis (2007) have suggested that “it may not be the case that more socially competent children engage in more play fighting, but rather that the play fighting may promote the development of social competency” (p 97). I venture to extrapolate further that play fighting helps children practise and establish social relationships and to make safe self-assessments with a view toward future risk-taking behaviour, and habituates its practitioners to unexpected events while stimulating neuromotor development. This conclusion is supported by emerging theories stipulating that physical play “facilitates healthy cognitive development by stimulating frontal lobe maturation, by alleviating ADHD symptoms (such as impulsiveness), and promoting prosocial minds through the maturation of behavioral inhibition” (Panksepp et al 2003).

Surprisingly, when children between five and ten years of age were asked about their perceptions of play fighting, “predominant reports of enjoyment of playfighting concur with the observational studies showing that the majority of playfighting bouts are friendly and do not lead to serious fights” (Smith et al 1992, 227). In contrast, a study about educators’ perceptions of the same subject found that “rough and tumble play was recognized by the participants as a common play form among young children. However, most ... indicated that the play is not appropriate at early childhood education facilities” (Tannock 2008, 359). The unpopularity of this type of play is demonstrated by the fact that studies conducted on the matter are few and far between, save for the two studies mentioned here. I can only speculate that the sensitivity surrounding physical play has made research into the matter academically, politically and ethically unsavoury.

The crux of the matter regarding physical play is that it appears overwhelmingly well-perceived by its initiators, appears to be a negligible source of injury during playtime and is a developmentally significant motor for social development and the development of social reasoning pathways in children’s brains. Most significant is that it is an enjoyable activity freely engaged in by children that promotes physical health.

Another effect on play increasingly quarantined by a culture steeped in narratives of surveillance, safety and intervention has been the physical alteration of the ecology of childhood through the ergonomic modification and homogenization of playgrounds to conform to safety standards. If, for the purposes of providing exemplary orientation, we take the statistics from the Canadian Institute of Child Health, which found that “children in 36% of studied child-care centres spent less than 10% of their time engaged in outdoor play” (Herrington and Lesmeister 2006, 64), it seems that the prevailing cultural preoccupation with safety and the dangers of playgrounds and outdoor play have, at least, limited children’s opportunities to engage in “gross motor movement” (ibid) and thereby reap the health benefits of that activity. At most, cultural narratives espousing safety and the sanitization of physical play have led to the decimation of the natural ecology of childhood.

Using Herrington and Lesmeister’s (2006) classification of architectural design for early childhood play spaces, I have observed an overwhelming prevalence of a peculiar blend of organic, late-modern and modular styles containing modular play structures and open spaces adjacent to structures containing “trees, terrain, rocks and shrubs” (p 67) to typify such play spaces in North America and Asia. These spaces are not unified by the notion that the space is “clearly directed towards a child’s innate sense of systems, mechanisms, and machines” (Dudek 2001) and they do not facilitate or “orchestrate movement in the play space, [in a way that] helps children understand that space” (ibid). Instead, these sites “[set] out to constrain and manipulate children’s playtime activities” (Thomson 2007, 55). Inherent in the logic behind these engineered childhood play spaces is the real, physical “culture of fear where risk avoidance dominates” (Herrington and Nichols 2007, 129). In general, such playground designs are “driven more by safety than developmental benefits” (Little and Eager 2010, 497). Not surprisingly, these kinds of modular play structures generally conform to North American standards for safety in design. Luckily, children can, *and do*, choose to play elsewhere; the fixed play structures are not the locus of all play but

options and variants that can be used when needed and if desired.

Here we see clearly the implementation of an organizational spatial logic in which “space is ... composed of functional zones but [not] of the fluidization of functional zones” (Branzi et al 1998). Also characteristic of modern playground space is the unavailability of natural and manipulative materials, like sand, clay and dirt, which have been replaced by rubber mats and woodchips. To the extent that “child development and play quality is enhanced when the environment allows children to safely explore their surroundings, experiment, try new things, accept challenges and take risks” (Little and Eager 2010, 498), in sites built using safety standards as guidelines, these developmental parameters are not fully adhered to. This observation is contrary to the notion that a “physical space that encourages spontaneous exploration may also reduce stress levels for children” (Herrington and Lesmeister 2006, 75).

Finally, and directly related to the conflation of risk and hazard in children’s play, the element of challenge is abundantly lacking in modern playground design. Ironically, “since the idea of play is to explore and maximize the potential of any play setting, children... [are limited to] test its use to the limits of their abilities” (Moore, Goltsman and Iacofano 1992). On most playgrounds, all the objects are fixed and in accordance with continental safety regulations, which does not permit their use in any other way than intended by the manufacturer.

All of these factors demonstrate the cultural narrative of parental overprotection and the educational predisposition to co-opt play for other purposes, to the detriment of play, the ecology of childhood and children themselves. The erosion of “pleasure or fun in running, chasing laughing, jumping, beating, and so on, ... quite literally pleasure or fun in the flesh” (Sheets-Johnstone 2003, 415) is palpable indeed.

Concluding Remarks

We need to step back from the contemporary clutter of competing pedagogies and embrace an ecology of learning that promotes broad parameters of classroom behaviour, play that is both liberating and physical, with nonprescriptive curricular objectives for early childhood learning, and evaluation and assessment schema that are not focused on academic imperatives. Given the biologically sacrosanct experience of play in childhood as a constitutive element of the human experience, as educators, as parents and as a society we need to halt our impulse (however well intentioned) to curb that behaviour.

Surprisingly, many educators caught in the hubbub of trends and fads disfavouring physical play admit that rough-and-tumble play occurs, even when not permitted. Perhaps most interesting from the study by Smith et al (1992), which investigated perceptions of rough-and-tumble play, was the finding that while not all children enjoyed play fighting and play chasing, many more said that they did engage in it. Thus, it might be practical for educators to undergo training in order to better determine which children are engaged in rough-and-tumble play against their wishes, instead of categorically forbidding it. Moreover, since play fighting is more likely to escalate into real fighting in the presence of an audience, educators can look for larger crowds on playgrounds and monitor them more closely to ensure that such escalation does not occur, and thereby make accurate distinctions between aggression and assertion, risk and hazard.

Finally, recognizing that “children [engage] in a range of play behaviours involving mainly low levels of risk as well as exploratory behaviour” (Little and Eager 2010, 507), it would seem appropriate to rescind the agenda of building artificial, sterile play environments in order to negate the influence of the culture of safety in the debilitation of physical, outdoor play in children, especially in light of the burgeoning obesity epidemic in our society. Subsequent work on these matters should seek alternative narratives of childhood and play that can be readily operationalized across schools and playgrounds and in all homes, and seek to recapture the vivacious, precious aspects of unfettered childhood while promoting “the bottom line. Let kids play!” (Marano and Skenazy 2011, 442).

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The Child's Backpack

Nicole Day

Nicole Day is a PhD student in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. Her professional background includes more than 15 years of teaching and leadership roles in Alberta public schools, and a master's degree in educational leadership and school improvement. She is the proud mother of two students, one in kindergarten and one in Grade 2.

Dumped unceremoniously at the door, lost in a pile of winter boots and snow pants, the school backpack is temporarily cast aside during moments of happy arrival. Snippets of fabric and glimpses of Disney characters become part of a child's homecoming explosion.

At some point, the backpack is retrieved. Perhaps quickly—by the eager child, excited to show evidence of the adventures of her day. Perhaps not until much later, when, with a start, a parent realizes it has been forgotten. Unzipped, the backpack is a treasure box that cradles the mysteries of the child's day. The contents pour forth: newsletter, lunch kit, single mitten, library book, spelling list, half-eaten granola bar stuck to a permission form, dripping water bottle and the now-soggy school agenda. The backpack is filled with puzzle pieces. Each child's successes, failures, stresses and joys are jumbled together, stuffed in and zipped up until evening. Then, the backpack is mined by parents, those attentive enough to wonder about the bigger picture those pieces paint.

The backpack is the hub of the school-day cycle. Each night it is unpacked; each morning, repacked. On good days, it becomes a vessel filled with love. Nutritious snacks, completed volunteer forms and a surprise note to the child are snuggled away and safely fastened. Unattended, it turns quickly into a landfill of once-necessary litter—hastily packed lunches; tardy school correspondence, scribbled with notes of apology; missed invitations to a birthday party; and Tupperware pieces that magically no longer match become part of a manic scavenger hunt, involving cramming and zipping.

The backpack is a powerful portal that bridges two different worlds. At school, the backpack is a piece of home for the child, grounding her throughout the school day. At home, it is a piece of school, connecting parents to the child's other world. A backpack carries bits of a child's independent self.

If it goes missing, there is worry. Lost—tears and trauma! Toil and stress as the child struggles—with hoodies and bulky winter coats—to strap it onto her back. Once the child is comfortably in its familiar nest, a sense of calm and rightness settles.

This sentinel comes and goes with the child—the child's constant companion. After parents lovingly squeeze their child goodbye, it remains protectively perched on the child's back while she trundles to the bus or traipses through the hall. It rides shotgun—until the child's safe return home, when it is dumped unceremoniously at the door. 🧡

Educating Young Giants: What Kids Learn (and Don't Learn) in China and America

Hongliang Fu

by **Nancy Pine**

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Hongliang Fu is a PhD student in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. She is particularly interested in comparative education.

Nancy Pine's *Educating Young Giants: What Kids Learn (and Don't Learn) in China and America* is of interest to teachers, student teachers, educational leaders, curriculum scholars, parents and policy makers interested in understanding the strengths and pitfalls of Chinese and American education systems.

Pine's professional experiences have taken her from teaching in elementary and high school to studies in graduate school, which have deepened her interest in exploring "how different cultures embrace and support learning" (p xi). Based on her observations over a period of two decades, she compares and contrasts the educational systems of China and America. Pine visited China frequently, observing lessons and talking with teachers, parents and students. As she describes her experience,

My understanding of Chinese classrooms has become more textured and refined with time. As has my grasp of how U.S. and Chinese classrooms compare. Each insight about Chinese educational perspectives helps me see American schooling in new ways. I understand how important polished lessons and detailed knowledge of subjects are in China, as well as the toll exacted by exam pressure. (p xiii)

Pine explores the similarities and differences in schooling between Chinese and American educational systems. Her intent is to provide a cross-cultural perspective on how we can learn from possible cross-cultural misunderstandings, and how educators and school administrators can benefit by learning from each other's most successful methods. She elaborates that her book is "also for those who seek answers to improving education in the United States so that our young people are equipped for the challenges of the twenty-first century" (p xiv).

The book is divided into twelve chapters, with each chapter giving an in-depth and holistic insight into significant aspects of cultural and educational systems in both countries. Chapter 1, "Hard Work or Natural Ability?" introduces "essential differences in how two cultures approach and view learning" (p 12). Based on Pine's personal experience in China, she introduces relative studies in terms of how Chinese children are taught to acquire knowledge by their parents and teachers. She points out that in China, the purpose of acquiring knowledge is not only for gaining the external knowledge that is mainly emphasized by Americans, but also for "perfecting themselves socially and morally" (p 12).

In chapter 2, "The Teacher's Role," Pine talks about teachers' responsibilities and professional development in China and in the United States. She says "the most striking difference between the two education systems is the nature of professional development for teachers" (p 20). Chinese teachers emphasize working collaboratively by watching and critiquing their colleagues within *jiaoyanzu* (teaching research groups within each school in China) and by sharing an office with colleagues who teach the same subject. American teachers "prepare lessons individually" and "seldom benefit from structured collaboration" (p 21). Another dramatic difference is

that in the United States, the teacher is responsible for teaching all subjects, while the Chinese teacher is a specialist in one subject across all grade levels.

Pine explains the role of teachers by giving specific examples of how American and Chinese teachers organize a lesson. In the United States, teachers play an important role in providing opportunities for children to express their ideas, connecting the knowledge to their lives, and encouraging work in groups or pairs; in China, with its heavy reliance on high-stakes exams, teachers' main role is preparing students to do well on the tests, which results in an inordinate emphasis on memorization.

In chapter 3, "The Confucian Thread," Pine briefly relates the history of the development and evolution of Confucian thought in China across two millennia. In doing so, she points to the ineradicable influence of Confucianism on the Chinese education system in terms of the relationship between teachers and students, and discusses the high expectation of students' academic performance. In chapter 4, "Depth of Understanding—Mathematics," Pine shares her observations of math classes in Chinese classrooms, vividly describing how teachers in China work collaboratively to create explanations of children's typical difficulties in mathematics and how mathematical concepts and abstract processes are memorized by students. Liping Ma's (1999) in-depth study comparing the emphasis in math is used to explain the different focus on math in both countries.

Chapter 5, "Pressure and Exams," introduces the entrance exam systems in the two countries. The sole criterion in the Chinese entrance exam at all levels of the school system is the score; in the schools in the United States, exams are one of multiple evaluation criteria, including references, volunteer work and special projects involvement, among other criteria. The Chinese exam, called *gaokao*, is treated as a controversial issue, one that is a social as well as an educational phenomenon in China. Pine illustrates the fierce competition among the candidates by explaining the content and time of *gaokao*. She looks at the exam from social, cultural and historical perspectives. Considering *gaokao* as a sociocultural product with a thousand-year history, her analysis provides a better understanding of the rationale and actual challenge of *gaokao* as a social phenomenon. In chapter 6, "The Influence of Language," Pine departs from her analysis of educational phenomena to draw our attention to the distinctive constitution of the English and Mandarin systems. She argues that the distinct approaches to teaching and learning literacy in the two countries can be explained by the differences in phonetic

clues and the relationship between sound-symbols within each language system.

In chapters 7 to 9, "Classroom Environment and Discipline," "Digging Deep" and "Performance and Improvisation," Pine turns her attention to the classroom environment and teaching methodologies in both countries, paying particular attention to pedagogical style and teachers' perception of teaching. In China, teacher-dominated classrooms leave less space for students to move and think independently, and the preplanned Chinese lessons are often rehearsed as performance, while in the United States, lessons are open-ended and unstructured but involve students' participation.

Through interviews with three college students in China who have taken the final *gaokao*, Pine extends her study to postsecondary education in chapter 10, "Aiming Toward College." Chinese students prepare for the college entrance exam starting in primary school, because of the fierce competition for entrance to prestigious universities. Pine presents the idea that parents in China are "less fun" than parents in the US, due to their important role in helping their children prepare for the final entrance exam. American parents are shown to place a greater emphasis on children's experience, with their children having more options with flexible time to balance their academics and social life.

In chapter 11, "Imaginative Engagement," Pine writes that in the United States knowledge is taught by "making multiple connections to reinforce learning" (p 138). In contrast, in China the focus is on memorizing texts. She describes the "integrated, creative curriculum" that engages children's imagination and develops their skills in America, which is particularly distinct from the way children in China learn by memorizing without innovative and creative development. She then addresses how Chinese reform on innovative and creative consciousness in education works with only limited efficiency; this consequence alerts western educators that local tradition and culture cannot be ignored.

In her final chapter, "Ready for the Future," Pine generalizes that there are challenges of dynamic social development that "require a radical rethinking of teaching" in both countries (p 149). To confront the challenges raised by technology and globalization in the Information Age, Pine advises that educators must prepare students to compete globally. What teachers should do to meet the future needs of society and their students is a relevant question in both countries. Pine suggests that answers may come through increased interchange of ideas between American and Chinese teachers, in which they seek to understand the most successful

methods of each system. Finally, she notes that “collaborating cross-culturally, in the process, would benefit everyone” (p 164).

By writing from her first-hand experience in the schools of both cultures and societies, Pine has successfully revealed the similarities and differences between the two systems, a challenging task considering her role as an outsider to Chinese culture. As a reader who is Chinese and an experienced teacher in China, I am deeply impressed by her keen sense of observation and the precise description of the complex educational phenomena in China. Pines’s interpretations as a cultural outsider caused me to rethink and reflect on the interplay of culture and the education system; we see our own culture differently through other people’s eyes.

The book *Educating Young Giants: What Kids Learn (and Don’t Learn) in China and America*, by Nancy Pine, is an essential read for any educator, especially for teachers in North America who have children from Chinese families in their classrooms. Throughout this book Pine shares many narratives of life experiences and uses these recollections in the points she wishes to make about educating young children. However, because the narratives and observations are not presented in chronological order, it is sometimes difficult for the reader to know how to place a particular event described in the book.

Reference

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Caroline Parker
Teacher
Calgary Board of Education

Carla Peck
University of Alberta

Jerine Pegg
University of Alberta

Annie Potter
Vanier College, Montreal

Annette Richardson
University of Alberta

Ann Sheehan
Edmonton

T J Skalski
Edmonton

Kathryn Smith
University of Alberta

Annette Swann
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Darlene Witte-Townsend
Johnson State College
Johnson, Vermont

Suzanna Wong
University of Alberta

Sherry Wotte
University of Alberta

Council Notes

Constitutional Objective

The objective of the Early Childhood Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association is to improve practice in early childhood education by increasing members' knowledge and understanding of this specialty.

Executive 2013/14*

President

Joy de Nance, Calgary

Past President

April Brown, Grande Prairie

President-Elect

Vacant

Secretary

Jennifer Bridle, Calgary

Treasurer

Karin Gizzas-Rivard, Calgary

2014 Conference Director

Janice Comrie, Edmonton

PD Cochairs

Danielle Kowalchuk,
Sherwood Park
Elan LaMontagne, Calgary

Journal Editor

Anna Kirova, Edmonton

Newsletter Coeditors

Fran Galbraith, Edmonton
Kimberlee Wrathall, Calgary

Alberta Education Liaison

Kelly Hennig, Edmonton

University of Alberta Liaison

Ann Sheehan, Spruce Grove

University of Calgary Liaison

Cynthia Prasow, Calgary

University of Lethbridge Liaison

Pamela Winsor, Lethbridge

PEC Liaison

Markiana Cyncar-Hryschuk, Edmonton

ATA Staff Advisor

Shelley Magnusson, Edmonton

Website Administrator

Stephanie Funk, Medicine Hat

REGIONAL PRESIDENTS

Calgary and District

Donna Lawson, Calgary

Central West

Val Fiege, Red Deer

Edmonton

Danielle Kowalchuk,
Sherwood Park

Fort McMurray

Allison Dakin,
Fort McMurray

North East

Carrie Fox, Two Hills

South East

Jennifer Deruyter, Medicine Hat

South Peace

April Brown, Grande Prairie

South West

Debra Watson, Lethbridge

University of Alberta

Angela Hill, Edmonton

University of Calgary

Danielle English, Calgary

* The 2014/15 executive will be elected at the November 2014 conference.

Membership

Total membership of the council is currently 1,920.

Conference and Other Programs

The council organizes an annual conference for its members on early childhood education. Attendance at annual meetings over the last several years has averaged 700. For information on the 2014 conference, contact Janice Comrie, janicecomrie@shaw.ca.

Several regional organizations of the council carry on programs for members in their areas. The council supports these regionals. It also occasionally offers workshops and other activities in areas where regionals have not been organized.

Publications

The Early Childhood Education Council publishes a newsletter, *Issues, Events & Ideas*, and a journal, *Early Childhood Education*. Members of the council receive these publications as part of their membership. Nonmembers wishing to receive copies of these publications may obtain them by paying the subscription rate of \$30 (Canadian funds) annually and writing to the Early Childhood Education Council, ATA, Barnett House, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1.

Website

The council maintains an Internet site at <http://ecec.teachers.ab.ca>.

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