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## PUBLICATIONS CHAIRPERSON

**Who Are You (As An Early Childhood Educator)?****A History of Invisibility**

It is generally agreed that, in the early childhood education field, a great deal of time and effort has been spent on observing, documenting, studying, researching, and theorizing about children. Additionally, ECE philosophy and practice have leaned heavily on a pedagogical tradition based on the notion of child-centredness. Within this context, early childhood educators have frequently been cast in semipassive roles as facilitators, gentle guides, observers (of the development of children), and planners of activities that follow children's lead. Since the late 1990s, however, questions have been raised by a number of scholars about how this particular history might limit and constrain the professional identity of the early childhood educator. Is it possible, we may ask, that a heightened attention on the child, along with an understanding of the child's growth as a process of sequential development requiring mainly a "warm" and supportive educator, has inadvertently veiled the complex pedagogical work of

the early childhood educator to the point of rendering it invisible? This is a big and difficult question to raise. Yet, within the current political landscape, where new policy demands are placed on both the ECE field and early childhood educators, responding to—or at least beginning to address this question—has become pertinent.

**The "Good" Early Childhood Educator**

Alongside, and in relation to, the issue of invisibility of the early childhood educator's pedagogical work is the stereotypical image of the "good" ECE teacher. Undoubtedly intensified by societal assumptions about women "naturally" taking on caring roles, the "good" early childhood teacher is typically portrayed as a substitute mother—a feminine, sensitive, nurturing carer of the young (Moss, 2006; Ryan & Ochsner, 1999). Sharon Ryan and Mindy Ochsner explain that these prevailing images of the "good" early childhood educator have often positioned early childhood teachers as apolitical practitioners who view change and activism as a responsibility to be placed somewhere else. In response, Ryan and Ochsner challenge teachers of young children to transform the dominant images of the early childhood educator through repositioning themselves from facilitators to activists or interventionists—as teachers who take a proactive political stance in order to expand definitions of what teaching in ECE means.

In *Embracing Identities in Early Childhood Education: Diversity and Possibilities*, Sue Grieshaber and Gaile Cannella (2001) address some of the issues emanating from a tradition that portrayed the "good" early childhood educator within the dominant discourse of nurturance and caring, or within what Louise Hard (2006) later termed the "discourse of niceness." Grieshaber and Cannella argue that contemporary understanding of identities as multiple and dynamic has opened space for early childhood educators to embrace a wider (and seemingly contradictory) range of

identifies. Early childhood educators can embrace the notion of nurturance and care while questioning and critiquing knowledge and practices, challenging authority, and upholding the idea that there is room for uncertainty and spontaneity because there are (always) multiple ways of being a teacher of young children.

In our Canadian context, Rachel Langford's (2006) research into the construction of the "good" early childhood educator within an ECE training program in Canada revealed similar issues to those discussed above. Early childhood educators in the training program imagined their identities by identifying personal traits that enabled them to be an alert and responsive teacher. The educators in the program tended to minimize their role as social agents, and were inclined to hide their world views when those were different from the mainstream. Langford called for a reenvisioning of ECE training programs in such a way that early childhood teachers may see themselves as significant agents of change in contemporary social and political struggles.

**Changing Times...**

*The early childhood educator as change agent.*

The identity of the ECE field is changing on a global scale. We have seen over the last decade unprecedented attention from policy makers on early education. We have witnessed an increase in the standardization of the field as numerous countries have created curriculum documents for the early years. Another international trend is the transfer of responsibility for early education and care from ministries of welfare, health, or children and families, to education ministries. While these changes pose new challenges to the field, including the possibility of new accountability measures, they also create an opportunity to surface some important questions about the identity of the ECE field and its protagonist—the early childhood educator.

*Action or reaction?*

The ECE scholar Sharon Ryan (2008) asks: How might early childhood educators act rather than react to the changes we are witnessing? In other words, she encourages early childhood teachers to become active participants who effect changes in the field, rather than being observers who react to these changes. Moss (2006) urges early childhood educators to take responsibility not only for their work but also for how pedagogical practice in ECE contexts is understood in public. Whether we choose to act and how we enter into these political discussions will be determined by the identities we dare to embrace.

In BC, a number of initiatives have already made it possible for early childhood educators to enter into dialogues with the greater community and to share, or make visible, the complexities involved in their pedagogical work with young children. For example, the BC Early Learning Framework (Government of British Columbia, 2007) portrays the early childhood educator as a researcher who continuously seeks to deepen her understandings of the practice with

others by using the tool of pedagogical narration. A number of early childhood educators from BC have been engaged in thinking about their identity through the ECEBC Leadership Initiative (Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2007). One of the leadership projects, initiated by Kim Atkinson and Danielle Davis and called the Images of Learning Project, has evolved into a travelling exhibit and a blog (see <http://imagesoflearningproject.com/info/>) which aim to expand the images of children and early childhood educators by sharing multiple stories from ECE settings. Through sharing these stories, the early childhood teacher's identity becomes less predictable and more surprising. The stories keep the question of who is an early childhood educator dynamic and provocative—as it should be!

In fact, it may be time to ask this question: In what ways have the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC) and its journal, *Canadian Children*, been a platform for sustaining and enriching the conversation about the politics of the identities of the early childhood educator?

**References**

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## Friends of Children Award Guidelines

*The CAYC "Friends of Children Award" was established to give CAYC a way of recognizing outstanding contributions, by individuals or groups to the well-being of young children. If you wish to nominate an individual or group for this award, please use the criteria and procedure below.*

**CRITERIA**

The Friends of Children Award may be presented to an individual or group, regardless of age, who:

- Has a history of commitment to the CAYC mission statement and/or aims.
- Has shown an outstanding scholarly, advocacy, innovative or practical contribution to the well-being of young children.
- May or may not be of Canadian citizenship.
- May or may not hold CAYC membership although it is encouraged.

**PROCEDURE**

- A nomination must be made by a member of the Board of Directors and be seconded by a member of the Board of Directors. Board members can, however, receive recommendations for nominations from individual CAYC members or from other organizations.
- Nominations will be brought forward at a Board of Directors or National Executive meeting by the board or executive member assigned responsibility for the award. This board or executive member will present and speak to the nomination.
- The nomination will be voted upon and passed by the Board of Directors with a consensus decision.
- The award will be presented promptly and in person when possible.
- Publicity of the award and the recipient(s) will appear in the journal, *Canadian Children*, and other publications where possible.
- The number of awards per year will vary.