

## Navigating Power and Subjectivity: Cultural Diversity and Transcultural Curriculum in Early Childhood Education

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*Professional learning communities (PLC) can build partnerships among diverse stakeholders that support transformative change and uphold social justice. In this dialogic, reflexive piece, the authors explore how a newly formed PLC in Alberta is engaging individuals in relational practices and discussions about cultural diversity in early childhood education. Through sharing their subjectivities, field experiences, and current research, the group members are defining and exploring ways to coplan transcultural curricula in culturally diverse education settings. By recognizing subjectivities and differences and honouring the needs of all learners, the PLC is raising cultural awareness and mobilizing efforts to build capacity and strengthen professional relationships across Alberta.*

**Key words:** early childhood education; professional learning community; cultural diversity; subjectivity; transcultural curriculum

### Why are we here?

A professional learning community (PLC) was created in the province of Alberta in 2015 to engage representatives from educational institutions, the provincial government, professional organizations, and practitioners in critical dialogue about topics and issues related to cultural diversity and transcultural curriculum in early childhood education (ECE). A transcultural curriculum moves beyond or transcends mere acknowledgments or acceptances of cultural differences. Through layering diverse cultural ideas and beliefs, the PLC members are forming new understandings of pedagogical theories and educator practices. Marjorie Orellana (2016) writes that “trans” is

a movement beyond borders, a transcendence or transformation of things that were being held apart, or artificially constructed as separate and distinct. This is not the same as hybridity, which presumes an even and presumably equitable blend of different forms. Nor is it the erasure of difference. Rather, it is about questioning the ontologies that hold things apart. It involves the resolution of dialectic

tensions and the emergence of something new—something that we perhaps cannot even imagine. (p. 91)

Designing and implementing a transcultural curriculum, therefore, is a creative and transformational process that PLC members are critically considering and exploring in the context of their own praxis.

Since the PLC was formed, group membership and interest in the work has continued to grow beyond provincial

borders through online platforms and social media. Using a dialogic, reflexive approach, this paper explores the positioning and subjectivity of the cochairs and their hope of expanding the work through sharing the PLC's successes and challenges, building strong bridges that reach across and through contested spaces and a vision of critical, transformative reflection and action.

The PLC was formed in response to the requests of ECE professionals who attended Carolyn's research presentation at the Alberta Child Care Association conference in Calgary in May 2015. Carolyn's PhD study findings raised critical questions about the time and opportunities provided to students in ECE postsecondary education programs to discuss and compare their cultural beliefs about pedagogy and child care with relative Western early learning theories and practices. During the research project, Carolyn interviewed educators, all recent arrivals in Canada within the past five years, who had completed their ECE postsecondary study programs in Alberta and were working in child care centres and preschools in Calgary. The study participants juxtaposed Western pedagogical theories and practices with their own cultural beliefs about child care and education and talked about specific issues they had confronted in the postsecondary classroom and field in Alberta (Bjartveit & Panayotidis, 2014, 2015). Some of the cultural differences the educators described included child-centered pedagogy—allowing children to make choices and guide their own learning; lenient Western child rearing and discipline policies and practices; the strong focus on developing minds and bodies and little attention to children's spiritual development; and wastefulness and the questionable management of materials and food supplies in ECE settings.

Following Carolyn's conference presentation, there was interest among the session participants to continue their discussions about cultural diversity and transcultural ECE. In response to their requests, Carolyn sent an invitation to the participants in her doctoral research study, conference session attendees, and professional contacts at various postsecondary institutions and professional organizations in Alberta. In October 2015, 40 people responded to her invitation and attended the first PLC meeting, which was held at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary.

Shortly after the initial PLC meeting, Cheryl joined the group as cochair. Her motivation to embark on the journey with this work is related to her first postsecondary teaching experience working with a cohort of First Nations students in an ECE diploma program. The students had experience working at, and indeed returned to work in, the early learning centres on their reserve when they completed their program. During the course of study, the students identified that the early learning centres on the Nations' territory did not have a specific curriculum that they followed and there was very little of the Nations' traditional culture practiced in the centres (Kinzel, 2015). Exploration of the ECE postsecondary curriculum exposed another gap as the planned delivery of curriculum was entirely Eurocentric in focus.

### **Troubling the dominant discourse**

While Carolyn and Cheryl worked together as cofacilitators of the PLC, the content of this article came out of our discussions and relational practices related to the work of the PLC, and about teaching and learning in culturally diverse ECE settings. We view this work through practical and theoretical lenses and frame it with Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2004) and Ted Aoki's philosophical and metaphorical ideas about dialogue and the "art of questioning" (as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 361). The work is also informed by critical pedagogy, which explores social justice education (Freire, 2000), and Indigenous methodology, which emphasizes a relational and decolonizing approach to research and practice (Kovach, 2009). We recognize that these are multiple epistemological and ontological positions, but we find great value in bringing together diverse perspectives, and these ideas work together to trouble perceived issues in the development and delivery of ECE curriculum in Alberta. We find that

our theoretical tensions lead us to challenge each other and our ideas and thus further our dialogue.

Our aim in this piece is to interrogate the concept of transcultural ECE through the ongoing work of the PLC as well as our personal positioning. Because we have chosen to focus on our own subjectivity within our pedagogical practices, we believe it is fitting to write this piece as a critical and honest conversation—an example of our relational practice that underpins our work with the PLC. The dialogic style of the piece also reflects the PLC members' casual conversations at meetings and on social media. Through engaging readers in reflection about social justice in ECE, we hope to provoke critical thinking about ways to mobilize dialogue about difference and diversity and action in the field. Following the ideas of Gaile Cannella (2002), we recognize that

within the context of social justice and care, respect would require appreciation of the value of all other beings, acceptance of multiple ways of thinking and being in the world, and a willingness to fight for an equitable and just community for everyone. (p. 169)

Ultimately, our intent in writing this dialogic piece is to disrupt and resist colonizing pedagogical practices and understand authentic and meaningful ways to invite dialogue and reflect all cultures in ECE programs (pre-K–postsecondary), environments, and curricula (Louie, Poitras Pratt, Hanson, & Ottmann, 2017).

### **Wait a second, who are we to be doing this work?**

**Carolyn:** I'm still wrestling with some of the questions we discussed at the education conference last May. How do you think we can develop and support effective professional partnerships through the PLC to facilitate teaching and learning in Indigenous and multicultural ECE settings? And how can we disrupt taken-for-granted professional teaching and learning practices in culturally diverse classrooms?

**Cheryl:** You are launching into a conversation about dominant discourses. Before we can explore that idea, we need to position ourselves in the work we are already doing related to identity, difference, and diversity.

**Carolyn:** I'm really struggling to situate myself within the PLC and I wonder what right I have, as a woman of "whiteness and privilege" (Carr & Lund, 2007), to facilitate discussions related to cultural diversity. I'm interpreting ideas as an outsider and I'm far removed from the cultures that I'm talking and writing about, which makes it very difficult to justify my position. My understandings of ECE theories and practices have been shaped by Euro-Western cultural perspectives on "good" child care and pedagogy, and immigrant educators will have different child-rearing practices and early learning philosophies, formed by their own cultural beliefs, histories, and traditions. You might remember discussing the notion of the "good teacher/mother" (Ailwood, 2008, p. 162) in your university graduate classes. The "good" educator upholds tenets of the dominant discourse about pedagogy and child rearing, adheres to universal stages of child development theories, and manages students by ordering and measuring their learning and behaviours (Langford, 2007, p. 343). According to Grieshaber and Cannella (2001),

the dominant discourse of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) constructs the identity of the good early childhood practitioner, the discourse creates both the desire to be the good teacher and a definition of the good teacher in DAP terms. Good practitioners are constituted and regulated within the claims of appropriate practice and learn to judge themselves as "good" or "bad" teachers according to that discourse. (p. 15)

Although I am continuing to explore my own subjectivity, it is causing tensions and troubling me. Recently, I was surprised—more shocked—when I came across a statement I had written in an academic paper a few years ago. I was referring to the works of philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992)<sup>1</sup> and Richard Kearney (2003). Kearney posits that

it's necessary "to accept the truth that we are strangers-to-ourselves and we need not fear such strangeness or 'act it out' by projecting such fear onto Others" (p. 8). I reasoned that because my own identity and ontological self is always and forever changing based on my lived experiences and interactions in the world, I am therefore "Other" to myself. Shifting my thinking from Self and Other to Self *as* Other and acknowledging that I am a "stranger" to myself—might enable me to put my fears aside and be more accepting of cultural differences. I now recognize that in doing this, I was attempting to make the Other *like* me—only accepting folks if they had similar worldviews and ideas—and not for who they truly are. Sonja Arndt (2015) stresses that

recognizing the foreigner within could become the catalyst for a humble, possibly frightening, re-imagination of being together and of communicating across and despite differences (Todd, 2004). This ... is the essence of community as an ethical commitment to maintaining and engaging with alterity, as a personal responsibility towards the other, to the individual and to humanity. (p. 890)

So, rather than putting fears aside, the tensions that I experience are productive in prompting me to reimagine different relationships and a "re-framing of a future in early childhood education that critically engages with the complexity and uncertainty" (Arndt, 2015, p. 890) of otherness and with all others.

**Cheryl:** It's okay to change and reassess how we approach our understanding, and critically question assumptions and privilege. Sometimes we need to be uncomfortable to reflect and grow. Exploring my own subjectivity has been a significant part of my work in graduate studies as I have wrestled with new knowledge about the world and my relationships within it. Nêhiyaw scholar Margaret Kovach (2009) reminds me that

the supposition of subjectivity and the interpretative nature of qualitative research imply a relational approach to research ... reflexivity is the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning making process.... Decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation. (pp. 32–33)

My journey has located me at a place where I am interested, through my professional roles, in working toward reconciliation. I am approaching this by specifically working toward meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) call to action #12, which calls for culturally relevant ECE programming for Aboriginal children and families (p. 2). As a non-Indigenous person who is exploring Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, I feel uncomfortable with approaching this research from a solely Western-European framework, and I believe that in coming to make sense of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, I need to take up the work of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous methodology. I align my socio-constructivist and critical pedagogical perspectives with Indigenous methodology as outlined by Kovach (2009) and Paulo Freire (2000). This alignment carries over to my involvement with the PLC. I am hopeful that this group will provide a voice to articulate the need for an Indigenous-led development of culturally appropriate ECE curriculum, because the Alberta ELCC curriculum framework does not offer this (Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova, & Massing, 2016). We need to step away from the role of "expert" (because of our academic credentials), open dialogic spaces, and listen to the wisdom of others (Louie et al., 2017). The difficulty with trying to infuse or add Indigenous content into a Eurocentric framework is well articulated by educator Emily Ashton (2015), who writes:

Curricular practices that espouse to embed, add-on, or infuse Indigenous pedagogical principles to already established settler frameworks are extremely problematic. Ethical, ontological, epistemological, and cosmological differences make such inclusions analogous to acts of colonization. (p. 92)

## Bridges

**Carolyn:** The focus of our first PLC meeting was to present current academic research about cultural diversity in Alberta, and to be honest, I didn't think it went well. Some members said they felt frustrated because they didn't have a voice or opportunities to share their ideas. Thinking back, we could have opened the meeting up and invited practitioners working directly with children and families in the field to present their work, too. But we are making changes as we move forward—learning how to facilitate the group based on building relationships and knowing the members. Relationships, relational practice, and storytelling are foundations of Indigenous epistemology and in developing and supporting the PLC (Kovach, 2009). Aoki (as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2015), describes cross-cultural dialogue as a bridge. It is important to develop strong professional connections in the field, and I view the PLC itself as a metaphorical bridge. Aoki writes that “on this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure us to linger ... [it is] a site or clearing in which earth, sky, mortals and divine, long to be together, belong together” (as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2015, p. 53). The experience of meeting people on a “bridge”—deepening our understanding about cultures, identities, and differences, and creating new pedagogical theories and practices through dialogue is important in developing relationships. But dialogue is also multilayered and unpredictable and reflects the complex, always changing self of subjects. Arndt (2017) emphasizes a need for an “attentive, receptive and reciprocal ethics of care” (p. 918) in our dialogic interactions with others:

Linguistic encounters and developing subjects that are “infinitely in construction” (Kristeva, 2008, p. 2) involve surprise, memories, dreams and fears, that can tear apart, in order to again cohere, in different ways, in the present and in and for the future.... The unknown and difficult implications—the fissures and bridges—of this life reassert the argument for depth, criticality and consideration in educational dialogic relationships. (p. 916)

**Cheryl:** I also think that we need to move into a dialogic space where we can question the dominant discourse and truly explore how this narrative may or may not fit for those participating in early childhood spaces in Canada. Culture itself is contingent and situated—always shifting and changing (Brooks, 2015)—and it shapes the ideas that are upheld and communicated through economic, social, and political institutions. This has huge implications for “learning” which we might understand as “overlapping, complementary or ... conflicting cultural practices” (Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, & Lee, 2006, p. 489). Learning is a complex layering of cultural beliefs, ideals, traditions, and practices.

I recognize that Western cultural beliefs have shaped my own image of the child and childhood and that historical and institutional constructs of contemporary Western child-rearing practices and child development theories point to issues of power. Jordan and Weedon (1995) stress that “*power* is at the centre of cultural politics. It is integral to culture ... all practices that have meaning—involve relations of power” (p. 11, italics added). If cultural politics shapes the meaning of social practices and determines who has the authority to define those meanings (Jordan & Weedon, 1995, p. 5), it explains why ideas that are different from the dominant discourse, or from what has been constructed and reproduced within Western cultural tradition, are often challenged and not accepted.

When we talk about “culture” we are referring to the social relationships and practices that are historically developed and shaped by communities to accomplish the purposes they value (Matusov, DePalma, & Drye, 2007). These practices include the tools we use, the social networks we connect with, the ways we speak to each other, and what we speak about. The dominant discourse in ECE is coming out of Eurocentric cultural norms and does not necessarily represent Indigenous and other non-European values, beliefs, and way of being, knowing, and doing (Archibald, 2001, 2008; Cooke-Dallin, Roxborough, & Underwood, 2000; Greenwood, de Leeuw, & Fraser, 2007; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Louie et al., 2017). But when we collaborate, as we are attempting to do through the

PLC, we are exploring the spaces in-between self and other, and are beginning to build connections and bridges.

## Sharing the Space

**Carolyn:** I envision a transcultural curriculum as a *story*—curriculum topics layered with the cultural beliefs, life experiences, dreams, imaginings, and pedagogical knowledge that individuals and communities share. Through layering, new and different ideas emerge that can be developed into storylines. So rather than curricula that promote Western cultural traditions and ideas, a transcultural curriculum might be imagined as “a set of great stories ... [with children and adults] as the storytellers of [their] culture[s]” (Egan, 1997, p. 64). Building relationships through intercultural dialogue is crucial in supporting a transcultural curriculum. It requires an “open and respectful exchange of views between [diverse] individuals ... on the basis of mutual understanding and respect” (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 10). Gadamer (2004) explained that the “first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us.... To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented” (p. 361). Attentive listening on the part of conversation partners might mean giving up control and being willing to change one’s ideas based on the unfolding conversation.

**Cheryl:** Working in relationship with others and working through a story is well articulated by Sto:lo academic Jo-ann Archibald when she states, “one does not have to give meaning right after hearing a story, as with the question-and-answer pedagogical approach. An important consideration is hearing stories over time so that they become embedded in memory” (p. 25, 2008). Building and sustaining relationships through storytelling and listening is a path to understanding and respect. This understanding is something I am exploring in my own doctoral research. I have become curious about dominant discourses in ECE and the hegemony of Western-European epistemology and pedagogy. How does this relate to early childhood education? What are we seeing in the field? What conversations are occurring? I think these questions are what initiated the idea for the PLC.

From my own research, I know that Indigenous peoples have historically educated their communities in traditional ways prior to and since colonization through successful methods of cultural transmission. This traditional system of education was disrupted during the period of the Indian residential schools when children were forcibly removed from their homes, and their families, and speaking their traditional language was punished (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The government-funded educational experiences of Indigenous people in Canada from contact through to the current era are stories of colonization and violence. Many scholars have explained that contemporary Canadian educational practices for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples frequently negate Indigenous knowledge traditions, continuing the history of cultural suppression (Archibald, 2008; Cooke-Dallin et al., 2000; Greenwood et al., 2007; Kovach, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Matusov et al., 2007). Given the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* (2015), I find myself wondering how the dominant discourse in ECE may or may not support call #12 which states, “we call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families” (p. 2). In working with communities and on a variety of ECE working groups, I repeatedly hear the call for the development of culturally appropriate curriculum and the addition of Indigenous voices from community members.

**Carolyn:** What can we do, as non-Indigenous professionals working in the ECE field, to support the TRC’s calls to action?

**Cheryl:** I see our role as doing the difficult work that moves us toward reconciliation (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Regan, 2010). I think exploring and recognizing our power and position is a place to start. Instead of being

the ones who direct and create, we need to move into positions where we ask and listen. Culture is unique to each community, and it will not be possible for a single curriculum to be inclusive of all Indigenous cultures (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). We need to engage in the dialogue that recognizes this and works to change it. We need to be genuine in our formation of relationship and do a lot more listening.

**Carolyn:** It also relates to my understanding of diversity and identity in the context of immigrants' experiences in the ECE field. Newcomers to Canada are bringing their premigration, migration, and settlement experiences with them. Schooling is a process through which immigrant and refugee children must come to terms with societal expectations while also staying connected to family and culture (Kağitçibaşı, 2007; Knörr, 2005). These children are often required to choose the world in which they will belong and are forced to navigate between different identities (Henning & Kirova, 2012, p. 226), which points to a need for new pedagogical approaches and theories. Through ongoing dialogue, listening, observing, and building relationships, ECE professionals must consider new and different ways to coplan meaningful learning experiences for all children.

**Cheryl:** How do we check our privilege and support the facilitation of a PLC group that has the potential to disrupt the dominant ECE discourse without having our own voices become overpowering?

**Carolyn:** We can turn to scholars who have taken up these same ideas and are addressing some of the questions that we ourselves are struggling with. It is interesting that researchers in Canada today (e.g., Bjartveit & Panayotidis 2014; Massing, 2015; Prochner, Cleghorn, Kirova, & Massing, 2014) are asking similar questions to those that Annette LaGrange, Dawne Clark, and Elizabeth Munro (1994) addressed 20 years ago in their research *Cultural Sensitive Child Care: The Alberta Study*—a project funded by the government of Alberta and sponsored by the Alberta Association for Young Children: How can professionals shift from “tourist” representations of culture, where they focus on symbols of culture, and move toward deeper understandings of Self and Other? How do educators recognize differences and include cultures into facets of ECE programs (pre-K–postsecondary levels), environments, and curricula in meaningful and authentic ways? And what can result when intercultural dialogue is not initiated and supported in ECE playrooms and classrooms?

## ECE curriculum frameworks in Canada

**Carolyn:** While early learning curriculum frameworks are being implemented across Canada, a subgroup of the PLC is extending an invitation and asking educators and professionals to participate in critical conversations about difference and diversity and how it is reflected in the Alberta ELCC curriculum framework. The members, many of whom work in culturally diverse child care centres and day homes in the province, are discussing how the Alberta ELCC curriculum framework concepts might be interpreted and implemented in Indigenous and multicultural communities of practice in meaningful and authentic ways, and how members of diverse communities contributed to the design, revisions, and implementation of the framework. We must remember that the curriculum is itself dialogical and its development must be based on the complex layering of lived experiences, cultures, histories, and diverse pedagogical theories and practices.

Earlier you mentioned that a single curriculum document is not inclusive of all cultures. I would argue that a “framework” design has open spaces for members within communities of practice to construct their own unique curriculum according to their needs and interests. Metaphorically speaking, I envision a curriculum framework as the frame of a house with the broad play-based goals representing the structural support beams. Two A-frame houses with the same structural design can look very different according to the materials that builders or owners choose to construct the walls. Similarly, educators, children, and parents in a child care centre construct “walls,” so to speak, or develop their curriculum based on how they themselves interpret the holistic goals and concepts.

Although the framework goals and concepts are established, the curriculum will look and be lived out differently in child care settings. Peter Moss (2014) explains that “a broadly defined ‘framework’ curriculum ... leaves plenty of scope for local interpretation and for local supplementation to express local conditions and traditions and locally determined values and objectives” (p. 181). Christine Massing (2017) emphasizes that discussions related to cultural practices, beliefs, and knowledges must occur within local contexts to inform and construct broader curriculum frameworks. The creative potential of a curriculum framework points again to our understanding of a “trans” cultural curriculum—the ideas people share are transformative and can potentially create new concepts and pedagogical approaches within unique communities of practice.

The PLC members are also addressing how language and terminology in the Alberta ELCC curriculum document might be interpreted in diverse ECE settings. Although the image of a “mighty learner and citizen—strong, resourceful and capable” (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 38) aligns with particular Western beliefs about children, how do these images differ from the views of people from other cultural backgrounds? Referring to a research study and bridging program—an ECE program of studies for refugee and immigrant women in Edmonton, Alberta—Prochner et al. (2016) explain that the image of the child included in the Alberta curriculum document was “a source of dissonance” (p. 54) for the study participants: “Images of children as innocent, precious, and special seem consistent with participants’ concern for helping children to do things” (p. 54), as well as a strong desire to protect children. So how can educators acknowledge and honour cultural differences in views and beliefs about young children in the context of the provincial curriculum document?

**Cheryl:** A framework is just that—a framing for later additions. However, I think that the framework itself, in this instance, represents the dominant culture view of what an ECE curriculum framework should be (Battiste, 2013; Kerr, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016). One of the challenges we face in early childhood education in Canada is to articulate a vision for children and families, and for ECE curriculum that works outside of dominant culture frameworks. The significant differences in epistemology and pedagogy of Indigenous and Western cultures would mean to me that we could not use the same systems or frameworks for both. The Alberta ELCC curriculum framework is not neutral and value free. It is developed from Western, dominant-culture norms and expectations.

**Carolyn:** It is crucial to engage with different stakeholders to initiate conversations and develop the curriculum. Building relationships through ongoing dialogue is the foundation of coconstructing a transcultural curriculum. A group of PLC members are currently making plans to meet with members of Indigenous communities and Elders to discuss concepts in the Alberta ELCC curriculum framework.

## Where do we go from here?

**Cheryl:** We are working in what sometimes seems like a fractured field-scape. Where is the network? The ECE field is made up of a variety of stakeholders with different perspectives and agendas. Reaching and engaging with all the stakeholders can be challenging and at times contentious. We do not always speak to each other or engage in a critical, forward-thinking, relational manner. We are not aware of all the work that is happening related to culture and diversity in the field. This is something that I am concerned about. How do we work together in a collaborative manner while still asking difficult questions? Is this a safe space? How do we engage and mobilize in a nonthreatening manner?

**Carolyn:** Any kind of change takes time, and mobilizing action to support rights-based education produces tensions and requires risk taking. But rather than turning away from tough conversations, we might learn to live within the tensions they produce—even *invite* tensions. By engaging in discussions, we might come to recognize



our differences and understand the complex and multilayered nature and deeper meanings of culture. I truly believe there is hope in continuing our dialogue, finding ways to disrupt dominant discourses and strengthening relationships in the field through the PLC.

In addition to our online and face-to-face meetings, we have launched a Facebook account to help mobilize knowledge about transcultural curriculum and our PLC, with the hopes of engaging more stakeholders nationwide in this larger conversation. Through online platforms we hope to share resources, children's projects, and current research in wider circles.

**Cheryl:** I think the field recognizes that teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms, and particularly in classrooms that include Indigenous children, calls for more than an acknowledgment of diversity. It requires engagement, listening, reflection, and action. Rather than ignoring cultural differences, educators can recognize dissimilarities as opportunities to initiate discussions and honour the needs of all learners by inviting dialogue even when it is difficult and uncomfortable—this in itself is an act of social justice. However, dealing with the tough questions of difference must be determined according to the unique circumstances and contexts in which individuals live and work together. We must consider how this work can be expanded and what actions it will require to support and continue the PLC in the future.

**Carolyn:** How the work unfolds will be determined by the PLC members themselves as we continue to discuss topics and issues related to diversity and difference and transcultural education in ECE. Through continuing the dialogue, we might learn how to listen and be more open to the ideas of others, as Gadamer (2004) suggests: “Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is ... the art of thinking” (p. 361).

I believe the hopefulness of this work—building professional connections and opening intercultural dialogue through the PLC—will make the playroom “a real space in the middle, where we can all stop and rest and work to find the ... epistemological forms that will mediate ... oppositions” (Grumet, 1988, p. 20). Difference is the foundation on which a transcultural curriculum is built. In creating a transcultural ECE curriculum with diverse paths of learning, educators, children, and families might arrive at new understandings of Self and Other and intercultural relations will be strengthened in culturally diverse ECE settings.

## Postscript

In recognizing that critical social justice requires dialogue and actions (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), three subgroups of the PLC have been formed to further mobilize change and implement plans to support ECE in diverse child care settings across Alberta. Recently, the entrance requirements and Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) for admission into postsecondary early learning education programs have been increased in Alberta. The members in one working group are discussing ways to build capacity in the field, supporting individuals to meet CLB requirements through the design of bridging programs that include concurrent language and ECE courses (Massing & Shortreed, 2014). The group is also planning to propose ideas to postsecondary institutions regarding ways to implement new bridging programs in partnership with community agencies and organizations.

Based on suggestions from the PLC members, a second subgroup is investigating postsecondary ECE programming and opportunities for nondominant groups to explore their cultural beliefs in relation to the Western pedagogical theories and practices included in the Alberta ELCC curriculum framework document. The members are attempting to define and understand a culturally responsive pedagogy within each of their professional contexts. This includes developing coconstructed curriculum approaches that support the inclusion of the lived experiences

of students and exploring how these lived experiences and coconstructed curricula can be reflected through other curriculum documents.

At a PLC meeting in April 2017, the members agreed on a new vision for the group: to share and increase awareness of current research, projects, and programs related to cultural diversity and transcultural curriculum in early learning in Alberta; to exchange ideas and engage in critical dialogue about topics and issues related to child care and pedagogy in multicultural settings; and to build connections and relationships among professionals working in culturally diverse child care and education settings. Since 2015, the membership has expanded to include individuals working in diverse settings, including professional organizations, school boards, government, postsecondary institutions, day homes, private and public child care centres, and preschools across Canada and as far away as Singapore. What began as an academically focused, Alberta-bound group two years ago has since become a growing community of professionals from diverse epistemological and pedagogical backgrounds, supporting members nationally and internationally.

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## (Endnotes)

- 1 Paul Ricoeur (1997) has suggested that the notion of “oneself as another” implies otherness to the extent that “one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other” (p. 3). This notion moves beyond comparisons of self to another and points to “oneself inasmuch as being of other.” In other words, we understand that the Self is defined, understood and affected in and through relationships with the Other (Kapuściński, 2008, p. 67).