Addressing Complexities in Early Childhood Education and Care: The Relationships among Paradigms, Policies, and Children’s Rights to Participate

by

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Abstract

This dissertation contributes to the field of Early Childhood Education and Care studies by providing the in-depth theoretical, document, and empirical analyses. The three types of analysis aim to build a case for the practical utilization of the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm is understood as a driving force for early childhood pedagogy which empowers educators, policy-makers, and academic scholars to apply a practical change in the field while acknowledging and sustaining the young children’s right to actively participate in matters related to their education and well-being. In this venue, the thesis provides (i) a thorough and productive analysis of the paradigmatic discussions presently available in the field of early childhood education; (ii) an argument for the practical application of the critical paradigm; (iii) an application of the paradigmatic debates to early childhood curricular and policy documents; (iv) and an empirical evidence from the field which has not been documented before and which gives insights to changes needed in policy directions and the preparation of pre-service early childhood educators.
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Acronyms

CDA  Critical Discourse Analysis
ECEC  Early Childhood Education and Care
ECE  Early Childhood Educator
ECP  Early Childhood Professionals
ELF  Early Learning Framework
OECD  Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
INTRODUCTION CHAPTER

Multiple-Paper Format

This dissertation uses a multiple-paper format and consists of an introductory chapter, a collection of three related articles, and a concluding chapter. A general purpose of the thesis is to bridge theoretical discourses, pedagogical guides, and ECE practices as they relate to the concepts of early childhood professional, young children’s participation and citizenship.

Introduction Chapter – This chapter lays the foundation for three interrelated papers by providing a framework for the study and introduces the overall concept of paradigm. The introductory chapter elucidates the typology of paradigms prevalent in the early childhood education and care field of study. It also describes the context and significance of the proposed research by unraveling the research questions and proposing the conceptual framework that guides the study and reveals the researcher’s theoretical disposition.

Article 1 – Paradigmatic Discourses: Reconceptualizing the Role of the Critical Paradigm & Revisiting the Image of the Child as a Social Agent. The focus of this article is to undertake a brief review of the myriad of educational paradigms that inform the field of early childhood pedagogy as well as to define how these paradigms represent the child in the process of pedagogical decision-making. The researcher engages with these paradigms as critical sites that are in sync with one another and situated in rational continuity as opposed to disconnected possibilities. The paper categorizes educational paradigms into the four broad clusters of modern, constructivist, postmodern, and critical-participatory. It alludes to existing tensions among the paradigms in their utilization of different pedagogical terminologies that adhere to the image of the child. In particular, the paper explores how specific pedagogical terminologies inherent in various educational paradigms imply an altogether different meaning once explaining about the role of the child in pedagogical process. The article argues that although the image of the child is well defined by paradigms, it demonstrates a tendency to change its scope when put in the context of practical applications of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. Therefore, the current paper concludes that the multidimensional and inter-relational use of pedagogical terms creates a possibility for relational theoretical and practical continuity as well as supports an ambiguity of interpretations about the role of the child as an active agent. The paper argues that
this issue can effectively be addressed if educators and scholars engage in the critical theory discourses. Critical discourses are viewed as significant incentives that ignite early childhood participatory pedagogy and help to establish the child as a social agent concept. In conclusion, this paper addresses the important issue of the image of the child as a social actor while reinforcing concerns for justice and academic action as they relate to the young child’s right to contribute to matters that relate to his/her education.

**Article 2 – Extending the Notions of Young Children’s Citizenship and Participation: What do Early Learning Frameworks have to Offer?** This article provides a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Canadian Provincial Early Learning Framework (ELF) documents. ELFs are defined as documents that guide early childhood educators’ pedagogy and endorse best practices.

Through a critical discourse analysis, ELF documents’ dispositions toward the concepts of young children’s citizenship and active participation are explored. Considering the strong connection between both concepts, they are viewed as central ideas in the critical-participatory paradigmatic discourse\(^1\). In this context, the critical-participatory paradigm creates a theoretical framework for analysis and motivates the researcher to critically examine the ELF texts to uncover the texts’ theoretical disposition. In line with the researcher’s commitment to critical pedagogy, utilizing the charter of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) becomes central. The article also includes a discussion of historical constructs regarding the concepts of participation and young children’s citizenship. After outlining the theoretical foundation for the literature overview, the axiomatic structure and paradigmatic inclinations of the ELF documents are identified. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of pedagogical vocabularies utilized in ELF documents in an effort to understand how the texts encourage early childhood educators (ECEs) to employ concepts of young children’s citizenship and participation in their pedagogical practices.

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\(^1\) The critical–participatory paradigm adheres to the humanitarian and egalitarian values of society in which education is understood as a process of empowering students/children and subsequently views them as active participants who are capable of contributing to society. It is based on the concepts of transformative, democratic, and culturally responsive pedagogy where heteroglossia plays a central role. As Bakhtin (1981) proposed, the concept of heteroglossia is a “base condition for governing the operation of meaning” (p. 428). Heteroglossia is in opposition to unitary, universal language adaptations. It suggests that meaning conveyed through the symbolic linguistic ordinaries such as word, utterances, and text is dependent on “social, historical, meteorological, psychological” conditions (p. 428). Therefore, as Bakhtin (1981) concludes, each individual creates his/her own meaning of the universal text. This unique meaning, when communicated, reveals multiple understandings of a particular phenomenon, text, situation, etc. When multiple meanings are projected in a discourse, they enrich not only a discourse on a given phenomenon by acknowledging various interpretations, but also individuals who participates in this discourse by encouraging them to revisit their worldview and life values.
**Article 3 – Consulting with Young Children: A Myth or Reality?** This article provides an analysis of empirical data addressing the concept of consultation with young children. The purpose of this research study is also to explore how early childhood professionals (ECP) understand in theory and employ in practice the process of consultation with young children. The study is guided by an emancipatory philosophy following the view that young children have the right to contribute to curriculum and engage in policy-related decision-making processes. It utilizes grounded theory design and employs qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. As part of the study, thirty-four early childhood professionals completed an online open-ended survey with five of the participants partaking in the follow-up semi-structured interviews. The findings discussed in the article reveal that early childhood professionals demonstrate an emergent knowledge about the concept of consultation with young children. These ECE professionals engaged in consultation with young children primarily for curriculum planning and maintaining cooperative relationships. In their day-to-day work with children, educators utilize strategies such as observation and documentation. The findings of the present study support the need for early childhood educators to further develop their professional pedagogies by expanding their knowledge of different educational paradigms and focusing on the implementation of the concept of the child as an active citizen.

**Conclusion** – The final chapter synthesizes philosophical, theoretical, and empirical evidence derived from the content of the three articles. It addresses limitations and outlines recommendations for the field of early childhood education. Ultimately, this chapter discusses the potential benefits of the research study for policy-makers, academic scholars, educators/practitioners, and individuals interested in advancing their knowledge about the complexities of early childhood pedagogy and children’s rights.
Contextual Background

Canada is a diverse country with ten provinces and three territories, with each province/territory possessing its own unique historical, cultural, social, and economic context. Early childhood services used by Canadian families somewhat vary from province to province and from territory to territory. They comprise childcare, kindergarten, home-based care, after-school programs, drop-in programs, and aboriginal head start programs among other services (Friendly & Prentice, 2012). Despite some differences, these services represent both publicly operated and privately owned services. As Friendly and Prentice (2012) explain:

By and large, Canadian ECEC policy and funding arrangements are weak and ineffectual. ECEC programs are limited in number and coverage, and often precarious, operated by underfinanced community groups or by relatively small-time entrepreneurs. What it means for children and families is that there are few good ECEC options in most of Canada. (Friendly & Prentice, 2012, p. 54)

Under the circumstances of existing patchwork in servicers and their ineffectual financing, the field of Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada continues to remain committed to its humanistic pedagogical values while espousing the process of theoretical and practical reconceptualization regarding the role of the child in educational and social matters. As Swadener, Peters, and Gaches (2013) denote, “The growing use of learning stories, documentation with children, and culturally relevant practices in early childhood in Canada also speak to ways in which childhood and children are understood” (p. 119). A particular example that stands out is the “Common World” project (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015), which signifies a complex theoretical and practical work undertaken by Canadian ECEC scholars in their effort to
reconceptualize concepts of childhood, the child, and pedagogy. Specifically, the “Common Worlds” project aims to overcome “divisive distinction that is often drawn between human societies and natural environments” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015, para. 2). This project adopts an interdisciplinary approach and addresses the complexities of early childhood by incorporating “children’s and more-than-human geographies, environmental education, feminist new materialism, and Indigenous and environmental humanities” while also addressing social issues such as colonization (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015, para. 1). Other examples can be found in the work of Judith K. Bernhard (2013) with culturally diverse immigrant communities and Luigi Iannacci’s work on reconceptualizing post-secondary curricula to “provide teacher candidates with opportunities to address and blur that gap between theory and practice through critical deconstruction and disruption of dominant and inequitable notions and practices as they relate to children with special needs or learning disability” (Iannacci & Graham, 2013, p. 55). These projects in tandem with advocacy efforts on the part of early childhood educators seek to restore the images of the child as a competent learner as well as to embrace an awareness about the ECE profession in the public eye (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Prochner, 2013). On its path to reconceptualization, the field of Early Childhood Education and Care has encountered numerous challenges related to historical, philosophical, democratic, and practical paradigmatic divides.

**Paradigm.** The concept of paradigm has been generally defined as a worldview informed by a constellation of concepts, ideals, and beliefs that guide people’s actions (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; 2000). Paradigms signify and filter our experiences with and in the world, and as Kneller (1984) posits, these modifications occur “because the world does not come to us already labeled with all its parts in order; on the contrary we have to categorize our experience of it so the world makes sense to us” (p. 2).
Historical paradigmatic divide. The field of ECEC has been perceived as a service that encompasses both educational and custodial care. This has led to fragmented understandings about the essence of early childhood educator’s profession which tends to reveal a divided knowledge base about the duties, roles, and educational purposes of those who work with young children under the age of five. As Vaughan and Estola (2008) denote, public misconceptions about the early childhood educator’s profession arose as a result of two concurrent notions that can be categorized as the exchange and gift paradigms. Vaughan and Estola point out that the exchange paradigm creates ego-orientation that is promoted through market relationships. This paradigm is economic-oriented and stimulates skill and knowledge domination as well as economic expansion through reinforcements such as investing in compulsory schooling (i.e. kindergarten establishment) while allowing ECEC to remain as a service on demand. In this context, the “market functions as an aberrant communicative mechanism” that influences our thinking (Vaughan & Estola, 2008, p. 27). Market-driven economic thinking instills certain types of behaviours in us so as to satisfy the logic of educational competition. In contrary, the notion of the gift paradigm follows a humanistic orientation. This stems from the conviction that “unilateral gift giving is possible” and it is visible through communication. In her earlier writings, Vaughan asserts that the word communication is derived from the Latin muni meaning ‘gifts’ (Vaughan, 1997). Such words are considered verbal gifts, “which take the place of material gifts in establishing mutual community-forming communicative relations” (Vaughan & Estola, 2008, p. 26). In other words, the exchange paradigm is the locus of control and logic which creates our being within structural environments. Meanwhile, the gift paradigm is our essence which views our being as humane individuals who always act as gift-givers, albeit unknowingly at times. Unilateral gift giving, as Vaughan (1997) proclaims, has always been a
part of the ECE profession as it embodies the principle of care. The care dimension of the ECE profession has been overlooked by the exchange paradigmatic point of view and can rarely be put on the market because it has always been considered as a natural part of motherhood which was never rewarded with monetary incentives (Vaughan & Estola, 2008). It is perhaps this underlying logic that has prevented ECE professionals from being paid at the level of school teachers. Therefore, ECEC follows dual objectives: service to be paid for (child care) and public education (kindergarten). Overall, the conceptualization of ECEC solely on the basis of the gift giving paradigm challenges the ECE profession to become a widely recognized, appreciated, and valued field of public education.

*Philosophical paradigmatic divide.* Early Childhood Education and Care has grown from two traditions: academic success and education for life. Both concepts have been widely explored in the Enlightenment era. As Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1997) explain:

If the ambition of the Age of Enlightenment were high, this was because the means appeared to be at hand: the power of human reason and the application of uniquely rational procedures, in particular objective empirical scientific method, and the numerous potentials of technology and industrialization. (p. 19)

In view of the fact that Enlightenment is known as the age of reason and rationality, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are considered Enlightenment philosophers who searched for the conditions “under which reason can be pursued” (Mac Naugton, 2003, p. 16). In this endeavor, Locke perceives the child as “tabula rasa”, maintaining that the child is born as a “blank slate or empty vessel”. With that in mind, Locke regards the education of the young child as a process of acculturation, assimilation, and intellectual growth. Locke believes in the power of adults who instill “beliefs, behaviours, and knowledge” in the young child (Bloch, 2006, p.
Locke contends that the adult should guide the child and teach him/her to suppress his/her shallow desires so as to focus on attaining knowledge. Passing the leading role in the educational process to adults, Locke submits that education needs to be fun for children. Consequently, he proposes that adults use a variety of tools and materials to ensure learning is more interesting and amusing for children (Mac Naughton, 2003). Locke affirms that education should have a positive effect on the child while also instilling a sense of autonomy, individualism, and “civil liberties and freedoms” in him/her (Bloch, 2006). Rousseau’s vision regarding the ultimate goal of education is not drastically different from that of Locke. However, Rousseau’s views toward education and the child vary from Locke’s position on these matters. For example, Rousseau believes that childhood is “a special stage in life with its own methods of thinking, seeing and feeling” (Buenfil-Burgos, 2000, p. 225). In his writings, Rousseau disagrees with Locke on a number of issues stating, for instance, that an emphasis on reasoning and intellectual growth in education for young children should not be a priority because children are “the masters of themselves” (Mac Naughton, 2003). In this respect, Rousseau recommends allowing the children to be free by letting them play their own games up until the moment they are ready to study. It is, thus, only under these conditions, that education can turn into a sensational life experience for children (Buenfil-Burgos, 2000).

A brief examination of the two philosophical traditions of academic success and education for life demonstrates that the educational divide regarding the application of democratic principles in education has been present since the time of Locke and Rousseau.

**Democratic paradigmatic divide.** Both Locke and Rousseau are known as Enlightenment philosophers who advanced discourses around the emerging political doctrine known as classical liberalism. According to Locke, individuals are free, equal, and independent and no one can
deprive them of their properties or subject them to a particular political power without their consent (Gutek, 1997). Locke, meanwhile, affirms that “social space is divided into private and a public realm whereas the public is considered to be the state and private is constituted by the family” and/or individual (Bowles & Gintis, 1989, p. 25). Locke’s philosophy conflicts with the Rousseauian perception of social order and social contract (Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004).

Rousseau believed that classical liberalism confined citizens by means of human-created laws to which they had to abide by. To this end, Rousseau claimed that social laws must be in harmony with the fundamental laws of nature. In other words, Rousseau believed in natural freedoms for all human beings and asserted that society with its socially established orders and laws cannot avoid oppression and dystopia (Bendorf & Bradley, 2006).

Since Locke and Rousseau’s time, the classical liberalist doctrine has undergone numerous changes in response to the social and political changes of the 20th and 21st centuries. Over time, the discourses surrounding the concept of democracy has also undergone countless transformations. For instance, Portelli (2001) acknowledges the contested nature of the democratic discourses and asserts that those who participate in the discourses “can safely distinguish between democracy as a form of government and democracy as a way of life” (p. 280). Philosophers and scholars who understand ‘democracy as a way of life’ contend that the relationship between the state and its citizens should not be merely addressed through philosophizing but probed and practiced in real life situations. As such, these intellectuals view educational institutions as alma maters where democratic principles of equality, freedom, and liberation should be learnt, examined, and practiced (Fielding & Moss, 2011). Specifically, Fielding and Moss (2011) consider “two further images of social constructions of the school
[...] the school as ‘person-centered learning community’ and as a place of ‘democratic fellowship’” (p. 53). In this vein, Portelli (2012) posits:

It is crucial here to note that when we talk about democratic education we are not referring to an education that follows so-called democratic governance. The focus is on the democratic way of life that needs to be enacted in educational institutions. (Portelli, 2012, p. 1)

With that said, all democratic intellectuals recognize that the application of democratic principles in education can be achieved only if children and students participate in open discussions. Through open dialogue, children and students along with educators create and practice democratic relationships where critical thinking and creativity play a central role in creation of informed choices. In this vein, both children and educators work for the common good of a community and its citizens. In this context, children, students, and educators are viewed as democratic agents who act in the interest of the public while also taking equity seriously (Portelli & Solomon, 2001). Despite the clarity in the message regarding the need to engage in educational spaces as democratic agents, too many educators are reluctant to apply democratic principles in educational settings, considering them to be highly political. This attitude has led educators to substitute democratic principles with technocratic, mechanic, and “banking knowledge” education, which has led to a practical divide in pedagogy.

**Practical paradigmatic divide.** Present-day ECEC pedagogical practices continue to express their devotion to the two traditions of adult-directed or child-centered pedagogies. In an effort to strike a balance between the two traditions, educators propose the utilization of the concept of play-based pedagogy. Play-based pedagogy strikes a balance between free play activities and pre-planned play activities. More specifically, the notion of free play activities
position the child as a protagonist of his/her learning. During free play time, children create their own play scenarios and choose play-partners (Gestwicki, 2011). Pre-planned play activities, meanwhile, are activities planned and orchestrated by adults. During pre-planned play activities adults focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills in young children. In addition, adults direct children’s learning through the use of “highly structured materials” and educational strategies that help children excel in cognitive development (Mac Naughton, 2003).

In spite of the paradigmatic divides, the field of ECEC strives toward the application of education for life while placing the child at the centre of the learning experience. While acknowledging the central role of the child in pedagogy, an in-depth exploration of the democratic principles of ECEC that adhere to the rights-based approach must be advanced. The rights-based approach is built on the concept of young children’s participation and citizenship.

**Identification of Specific Issues**

Since the publication of Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence’s (1997) *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of Evaluation*, an increase in awareness regarding the image of the competent child has been witnessed. This image coincides with the concepts of young children’s participation and citizenship as well as with the principles of the rights-based approach in ECEC (Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot, & Weyenberg, 2006; Cannella, 1997; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003, 2005; Moss & Dahlberg, 2005; Penn, 2008; Palaiologou, 2012; Sellers, 2013; Soto & Swadener, 2005; Woodhead, 2006, 2008). In this vein, the current study addresses six interconnected issues that emerge from the discourses surrounding the concepts of the competent child, the child as an active participant and citizen, as well as the child as a contributor to educational and social matters.
First, the study recognizes that although there are numerous paradigms that inform the early childhood studies and pedagogy, preference is given to modern and constructivist worldviews, particularly those that adhere to the developmental theoretical perspective (Dahlber, Moss, & Pence, 1997; MacNaughton, 2003, 2005; Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot, & Weyenberg, 2006; Moss, 2007; Smith & Campbell, 2014);

Second, the study views the excessive use of pedagogical vocabularies as problematic (Moss, 2007, 2008). The interchangeable use of pedagogical terms allows for an array of interpretations for the same educational phenomenon and as such creates opportunities for paradigmatic misappropriation with regard to certain pedagogical terms. The misappropriation of pedagogical terms can, in turn, lead to the development of misconceptions in understanding children’s role in educational and social contexts.

Third, the study acknowledges that there are numerous challenges regarding the practical and contextual applications of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This is particularly evident for rights that adhere to the child’s right to participation and expression (Lansdown, 1994; Freeman, 2010; Woodhead, 2008).

Fourth, the study recognizes that the challenges associated with accepting and understanding the child’s multiple forms of expression and interpretation of reality can lead to the devaluation of the concept of the child as a competent communicator and a rational human being (Taguchi, 2010; Palaiologou, 2012; Sellers, 2013).

Fifth, the study attaches importance to the fact that there are challenges to overcoming traditional views on education and to reconceptualizing the ECEC pedagogy. Subsequently, the role of the child in decision-making processes is diminished due to the lack of early childhood educators’ knowledge and the inability to apply critical pedagogy in early childhood settings.
Critical pedagogy is not thoroughly taught to pre-service educators in ECE diploma or degree programs in post-secondary education (MacNaughton, 2003, 2005; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Moss, 2013).

Sixth, the study points out that economical and structural factors impose some challenges and restrictions on early childhood educators in their effort to implement democratic principles in ECE pedagogy (Vaughan, 1999; Clark & Moss, 2011; Urban, 2015).

In line with the issues raised, the researcher examined the literature on the concept of the image of the competent child from both North American and international sources. To address the discourses derived from the extensive literature review, the researcher worked on the three interrelated articles. The articles explored existing ECEC paradigmatic discourses, government produced early learning frameworks, and early childhood practitioners’ views on young children’s participation.

Research Questions

Overarching research questions. The current study was guided by three research questions as the researcher worked within and between paradigms in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. What the researcher aimed to address is the degree to which the concept of young children’s participation in educational and social matters has been conceptualized in line with a number of factors including educational paradigms, ELF documents, and ECE professionals who work in the field. Specifically, the researcher asked:

1. How do the existing educational paradigms conceptualize the role of the child in the ECEC curriculum?
2. How do the Early Learning Framework documents utilize and interpret the concept of the competent child which adheres to children’s rights to participate in matters that effect their life?

3. How do early childhood professionals understand the purposes of consultation with young children and apply them in their day-to-day practice?

Conceptual Framework

![Conceptual Framework Diagram]

*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework*

This study draws from a number of philosophical and theoretical discourses in early childhood literature and addresses the concept of young children’s participation and citizenship. The literature primarily suggests that these discourses are located in modern, constructivist, and postmodern paradigms. The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) builds on these
discourses and directs them toward a forth paradigm known as the critical, participatory paradigm. This paradigm addresses to the concept of children’s participation in relation to social activism and praxis. This requires the implementation of participatory learning models and leads to the social and ecological transformation of society as well as the promotion of democratic principles in education. According to Hultqvist (1997),

Inherent in this vision is the liberal idea to set the child free. The child must be released from the old order, for example from the traditions and conventions of the adult society, in order for the child to be able to realize their (and the person’s) full potential.

(Hultqvist, 1997, p. 419)

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical pedagogy is the theoretical framework informing this study. As Giroux explains, “Critical pedagogy takes as one of its central projects an attempt to be discerning and attentive to those places and practices in which social agency has been denied and produced” (Giroux, 2011, p. 3). Critical pedagogy helps to identify and analyze the perspective of the young child through various social constructs. It draws the attention of educators, researchers, and policy-makers to fundamental questions such as whose voices are included or excluded in the ECEC discourses. Here, critical pedagogy functions as a lens for viewing ECEC as an important area of social struggle that provides young children with alternative ways of being recognized, heard, and valued.

Critical pedagogy has a profound historical and social component. It has been widely presented in the scholarly works of the Frankfurt School, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Joe Kincheloe among others. Critical pedagogy rests on Freire’s notion of
“practice for freedom” that focuses on “the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 1997, p. 34).

According to McLaren (2013), critical pedagogy is “part of a geopolitics of knowledge” and its goal is to “struggle for a socialist alternative” confronting the growing consumerism of neoliberal education (para. 1). Meanwhile, Giroux (1997) asserts that ideology plays a significant role in the formation of educational thought. Giroux posits, “the making of citizens must be understood as an ideological process through which we experience ourselves as well as our relations to others and the world within a complex and often contradictory system of relationships and images” (Giroux, 1997, p. 16). Kincheloe (2008) denotes, “Advocates of critical pedagogy are aware that every minute of every hour that teachers teach, they are faced with complex decisions concerning justice, democracy, and competing ethical claims” (p. 1). What unites critical scholars is that they understand education to be an extremely political process where intellectuals challenge the political complications of schooling under the pretext of neutrality. Additionally, critical scholars address the issues such as how economical and ideological forces tied to the mainstream power structure influence education and classroom pedagogies.

Currently, reconceptualist views in ECEC contribute to a “complicated conversation about race, class, gender, sexuality, theology, democracy, ecology, aesthetics, and pedagogy in the global community of the new millennium” (Slattery, 2006, p. 14). Bloch (2006) supports this position and emphasizes that ECEC curricula erroneously understand the child as an “observable, testable” individual whose developmental and learning outcomes are based on “predictable scientific evidence” (p. 38-39). Similarly, Cannella (1997; 2014) posits that the
mainstream educational approach of developmental constructivism perceives the child as a learner of academic knowledge whose main task is to evolve intellectually. Cannella further explains that “the beliefs and language of developmental psychology have become part of our daily lives, a part of what we expect from ourselves and others” to the point that educators do not even question the truths behind it (Cannella, 1997, p. 52). Echoing Cannella’s views, Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1997, 2007) assert that developmental psychology is a social construct of modernity that assumes the universality and certainty of educational order. Recognizing the potential of the developmental approach, ECEC reconceptualists caution educators that it is their duty to decide whether psychological truth is the only truth that should be championed regarding the child.

Thus, critical pedagogy is understood as the most suitable educational paradigm for this study. It offers a number of compelling arguments that guide the discourses prevalent in the research. In particular, critical pedagogy is seen as a dynamic paradigm that is responsive to current economic and social realities. It promotes social activism at a practical level and moves beyond the theoretical plane while addressing issues of power and privilege in meaningful ways. In this sense, critical pedagogy helps the ECEC field to re-think the role of the child in society and to produce the images of the competent and “agentic” child within the interplay of political, economic, and social agendas. It also helps to challenge the notion that children are a socially vulnerable population while also challenging the mainstream images of (in)competent children and (un)just educational practices.

The Child as a Social Actor and Young Children’s Participation: What does the Critical Paradigm have to offer?
The critical paradigm finds its practical applications through the veins of critical pedagogy. It shows a strong commitment to pedagogy that supports young children’s right to participate. The critical paradigm, as later explained in the thesis, values human rights, promotes dialogic learning environments, emphasizes diversity and utilizes democratic principles in classroom pedagogical practices. The critical paradigmatic principles of historical revisionism along with emancipatory action oriented pedagogies support a notion that participation is a key for the successful application of educational and social theories in practice. As Lansdown (2010) explains:

Participation is a fundamental human right in itself. It is also a means through which to realise other rights. It recognises children as citizens entitled and […] able to contribute towards decisions that affect them, as individuals, as specific groups of children […], and as a constituency. (p.13)

The critical paradigm explicitly promotes the view of the child as a citizen in his or her own right. This is crucial to the understanding and practice of the critical perspective. The concept of citizenship focuses on the right of the child to express his or her opinion freely and emphasizes that these opinions need to be taken seriously in our pedagogical decisions. Therefore, critical theory along with critical pedagogy strongly encourage educators to take action upon children’s views while becoming guarantors and supporters of the children’s rights to participate. Some examples of practice/actions that emerge from the critical perspective regarding children’s participation include: asking for children’s permission when they are observed and evaluated, and whether or not that their art work can be shared in public, consulting with children when the physical environment is being set up, consulting with children for policy
decisions regarding curriculum, daily procedures in the class, etc. (Kjørholt, 2005; Smith, 2013; Soto & Swadener, 2005).

The critical paradigm promotes dialogic pedagogies. From the works of Bakhtin (1981) and Freire (1997; 2007) dialogue is “framed by mutual trust among participants that grows from faith and humanity” (Harris & Manatakis, 2013, p. 80). It creates opportunities for expressions with no fear for being judged or neglected. Such opportunities emerge only when educators are fully aware of this possibility. In other words, if educators embrace trust in the children’s competences they start to balance the power and to create relationships of mutual respect and acknowledgement. Paving a path towards dialogic relationships, educators become more critical and cognisant about children’s various abilities to communicate. Ultimately educators recognize children’s abilities to philosophize about and reflect upon the world around them. And this leads to the next point.

The critical paradigm acknowledges and addresses diversity in a broad sense. The critical paradigmatic discourse on diversity goes beyond those that address ‘culture’. It emphasizes physical, racial, ethnic, gender, historic, ‘language games’, ideological, political, and social class issues. Here, the critical paradigm’s ideological, political, and social class discourses are fundamental as they interrogate ideologically sanctioned knowledge, traditional views about children, and patriarchal social orders that exclude children from grand pedagogical and social narratives (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2003). While addressing these three major concepts, the critical paradigm is vocal about the fact that children as a social class/group are positioned at the lowest level of the hierarchical ladder. Subsequently, the critical paradigm encourages educators to step away from a traditional understanding of children as a vulnerable population/class and to construct a novice image of the child as a social agent. This fact cannot be omitted from the
discussions on young children’s participation as it adds an invaluable asset to practice of
democratic principles in education.

As explained by many critical scholars, democracy is a ‘robust’ process that ought to be explored and practiced on a daily basis. Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) clarify:

As a teaching strategy, democracy refers to staff and children sharing power over what happens in the early childhood centre. It is a teaching strategy that focuses particularly on children’s right to participate in decisions and experiences that affect them and to build the skills needed for democratic living. (p. 285)

Therefore, the critical paradigm is the most explicit and coherent in addressing the image of the child as a social agent with the right to participate. It addresses a wide range of concepts related to power, ideology, class, gender, culture, etc. and, therefore, provides a strong foundation for practical applications of the young children’s participation concept in early childhood pedagogy. Critical scholars, Christensen and James (2000) summarize it well by arguing that it is “critical” for the field of ECEC studies “to address the theoretical and policy implications of treating children as social actors in their own right in contexts, where, traditionally, they have been denied those rights of participation and their voices have remained unheard” (p. 2).

Significance

An overview of the literature that focuses on the rights-based approach provides philosophical as well as practical accounts that support the application of children’s rights in practice. These studies have addressed young children’s rights across a broad spectrum of issues related to the young child’s citizenship (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008). A common
theme prevalent in the studies explored is the notion that the young child is an individual who possesses the rights to actively express his/her ideas while using a variety of tools to communicate his/her views. Furthermore, the studies investigated stress that children have the right to self-realization through participation. Kjørholt (2005) asserts, “In order to make a more humane society and recreate social life, the child [has] to realize his or her full potential” (p. 166). Soto and Swadener (2005) echo these sentiments and state, “A growing number of international ‘reconceptualizing’ scholars continue to critique dominant models of scholarship that have often privileged narrow areas of largely quantifiable research and have done little to enlighten the needs of learners in the democratic sphere” (p. 2). Thus far, studies in psychology along with developmental and social constructivist pedagogical philosophies remain highly influential in Canadian research, policy, and professional education for pre-service early childhood educators (Langford, 2012). Hence, there is a growing need to carry out further research related to the concept of children’s participation in the Canadian ECEC context. This study builds on the scholarly works of Gail Sloan Cannella, Glenda Mac Naughton, Kyle Smith, Beth Blue Swadener, Peter Moss, Michael Woodhead among others and provides philosophical discourses as well as empirical evidence in an effort to transform the concept of children’s participation and citizenship. It also recognizes that early childhood settings as well as schools are “powerful loci for [in]exclusion and ‘othering’ of poor children, children of colour, and children with disabilities”, which limits young children’s participation by establishing “adult-driven spaces” (Polakow, 2014, p. 270; Smith, 2013). This study extends our knowledge about the concept of young children’s participation and active citizenship by utilizing critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework to analyze scholarly literature on early childhood psychology, philosophy and curriculum studies. The research also explores the early learning framework’s
disposition toward young children’s participation and active citizenship and examines early childhood professionals’ understandings of the purposes behind consultation with young children. In engaging with the literature on the aforementioned topics, the current study aims to appeal to early childhood policy-makers, curriculum developers, and practitioners as to the importance of the concept of young children’s participation. This is part of a broader project of nurturing meaningful learning environments for young children as well as taking critically reflective action toward improving ECEC provisions. What emerges as part of this dynamic interaction is “an innovative model of the young child, a new concern with young children’s rights as citizens and new knowledge about the significance of young children’s experiences” (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007, p. 458) because early childhood educators “and community-based professionals are in ideal position to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families” (Robinson & Diaz, 2016, p. 7).
ARTICLE 1 – Paradigmatic Discourses: Reconceptualizing the Role of the Critical Paradigm & Revisiting the Image of the Child as a Social Agent

Abstract

The focus of this article is to undertake a brief review of the myriad of educational paradigms that inform the field of early childhood pedagogy as well as to define how these paradigms represent the child in the process of pedagogical decision-making. The researcher engages with these paradigms as critical sites that are in sync with one another and situated in rational continuity as opposed to disconnected possibilities. The paper categorizes educational paradigms into the four broad clusters of modern, constructivist, postmodern, and critical-participatory. It alludes to existing tensions among the paradigms in their utilization of different pedagogical terminologies that adhere to the image of the child. In particular, the paper explores how specific pedagogical terminologies inherent in various educational paradigms imply an altogether different meaning once explaining about the role of the child in pedagogical process. The article argues that although the image of the child is well defined by paradigms, it demonstrates a tendency to change its scope when put in the context of practical applications of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. Therefore, the current paper concludes that the multidimensional and inter-relational use of pedagogical terms creates a possibility for relational theoretical and practical continuity as well as supports an ambiguity of interpretations about the role of the child as an active agent. The paper argues that this issue can effectively be addressed if educators and scholars engage in the critical theory discourses. Critical discourses are viewed as significant incentives that ignite early childhood participatory pedagogy and help to establish the child as a social agent concept. In conclusion, this paper addresses the important issue of the image of the child as a social actor while reinforcing concerns for justice and academic action as they relate to the young child’s right to contribute to matters that relate to his/her education.
Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been increasing public, educational, scholarly and policy interest in the field of ECEC, leading to a number of philosophical discourses that require further attention. The growing presence of postfoundational perspectives (Moss, 2007, 2008; Ninnes & Mehta, 2004; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) including postmodernist, poststructuralist, and postcolonialist discourses have denoted an increasingly complex and fluid understanding of ECEC paradigms. These postfoundational perspectives have presented a novice image of the child articulating that the child is a competent learner and a human being in his/her own right (Bloch, Swadener & Cannella, 2014; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Moss, 2013). This is while, more contemporary interpretations of the concept of ‘the image of the child’ have been significantly influenced by ideological and economical agendas. This fact has led to problematic implications of the term in practice. In particular it has opened an opportunity for the use of the two terms, ‘the competent child’ and ‘the child with competencies’ interchangeably. Interchanging these two terms poses a challenge for educators to adequately apply the concept of ‘young children’s participation’ in practice.

The paradigmatic relative continuity that currently exists in the field of ECEC shifts the meaning of the concept of the competent child by allowing cultural, economic, and political forces to sanction a self-serving use of this term. The postmodern discourse regarding the image of the competent child as a mediator for change and transformation in ECEC system and policy delivery has nonetheless encountered serious challenges. There has also been an increasing demand to revisit paradigmatic interpretations of the concept of the competent child. As Moss et al. (2016) explain, the issue becomes even more complicated if one considers that the external factors of economic globalization in today’s world have persistently substituted the image of the
competent child with the image of a child with developmentally appropriate competencies and school-oriented skills development.

Moss (2007, 2008) contends that every educational paradigm possesses its distinct vocabulary. However, pedagogical terminologies are rarely situated within the confines of one paradigm and instead have a tendency to flow through different paradigms and transcend paradigmatic boundaries. One of the central arguments of this article is that the critical paradigm asks important questions by exposing educators to difference, complexity, and uncertainty without claiming to be the answer to all the shortcomings of ECEC discourses. Accordingly, the article focuses on how the critical paradigm addresses, defines, and exposes existing misappropriation of the term image of the competent child (De Lissovoy, 2008).

The article enters the discourse around ECEC paradigms by identifying the significance of the proposed literature overview to the field of ECEC studies. It represents a general review of the paradigms, discusses the effects of the paradigms’ core concepts as related to curriculum design, and consequently on the concept of the child. The article provides a critique of the paradigms to elucidate the drawbacks of each paradigmatic disposition. It concludes that a number of compelling arguments support the need for a more in-depth look at and a stronger representation of the critical paradigm (CP) in ECEC. There are a number of reasons as to the need to advance the critical paradigm: CP is more dynamic than other paradigms; CP is more responsive to current economic and social issues; CP promotes social activism at a practical level and moves beyond the theoretical plane; CP addresses issues of power and privilege in meaningful ways.

Significance of the Proposed Discourse

Paradigms
The historical attempt to identify, describe, and disentangle paradigms can be traced back to great philosopher like Foucault, Habermas, Kuhn, and Kant to as far back as Aristotle and Plato. While these efforts were made at different times and in various fields, there have been consistent references to philosophy, physics, linguistics, research, and education. For instance, Habermas (1972) proposed the three paradigmatic orientations of empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and critical theoretic aimed at interpreting knowledge as a theoretical construct. Lincoln and Guba (1994; 2000) later argued that positivist, constructivist, critical theory, postpositivist, and participatory paradigms inform the field of educational research and are therefore capable of responding to ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions.

Contemporary Early childhood scholars, in turn, have discussed how the field of education has been impacted by different paradigmatic discourses (Bennett, 2004; Dahlberg & Taguchi, 1994; Mac Naughton, 2003; Moss, 2007; Woodhead, 2006). For instance, Dahlberg and Taguchi (1994) explore two predominant social constructs of the child in the preschool and elementary school setting. Bennett (2005), meanwhile, argues that the decisions made in the context of ECEC curricula have a predominantly cultural orientation. Bennett (2005) identifies two competing traditions in ECEC that are informed by historical and social traditions. These traditions have led to the construction and eventual adoption of pre-primary and social pedagogical approaches to educating young children. Moss (2007) maintains that developmental psychology has had a powerful and persistent impact on ECEC curriculum design to the point that it is nearly impossible to dissociate the two in any real sense. Accordingly, Moss (2007) calls for a re-evaluation and subsequent detachment from traditional views of the child as an immature being and instead urges us to think outside the box of developmental psychology by embracing the philosophical dispositions of Continental European philosophers such as Levinas,
Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida. Mac Naughton (2003) outlines the three central approaches of conforming, reforming, and transforming in order to interpret early childhood pedagogy, curriculum design, and the role of the child as learner. Woodhead (2006) states that developmental, political, economic as well as socio-cultural and human rights perspectives inform early childhood studies and pedagogy. Despite apparent differences in names and interpretations, all scholars are in agreement that early childhood paradigmatic perspectives diverge “based on different epistemological paradigms and sciences that both at times support and, at times, severely contradict each other in terms of their results and consequences for pedagogical practices in early childhood provision” (Taguchi, 2010, p. 7).

**Pedagogical Terminologies that Impact the Practice of Early Childhood Education**

Following Kneller’s (1984) assertion that, “Since we think with the aid of words, we use them to label our concepts” (p. 4) this paper explores the paradigmatic use of pedagogical terms in early childhood curricula and their implications for assigning the child a role in curriculum. Here, it is important to distinguish between the implications existent in the paradigmatic use of pedagogical terminology as opposed to their general use in linguistics. Pedagogical terminologies “with regard to both content and presentation” are ‘language particular’ as opposed to ‘coherent and systematic’ when used in the literature (Taylor in Geiger & Rudzka-Ostyn, 1993). With this in mind, Moss (2007) points out that each and every educational paradigm possesses its *distinct vocabulary*. This vocabulary or a set of linguistic units can fulfill two roles – one is a general usage of terms and the other is context-based applications for specific purposes. Here, an important point of contrast among the educational paradigms involves the use of pedagogical terms that are not merely dependent on epistemological or methodological assumptions associated with a particular paradigm but rather reliant on the
historical, cultural, political, or economic contexts within which the terms are employed. In other words, when epistemological and methodological paradigmatic dogmas are embedded in a particular context, they create a setting where pedagogical terms are compelled to adapt. In essence, this has highlighted significant challenges for educators who opt for defining the image of the child as a social agent.

**Image of the Child as a Social Agent**

The term ‘the image of the child’ has gradually expanded from the image of the scientific child to the image of the competent child by encompassing a number of subsidiary concepts ranging from ‘alternative’ to mainstream. The term ‘competent child’ was coined to disrupt the notion of one dominant psychological image of a *child-in-training* and to promote ‘innovative’ and ‘novice’ understandings of the complexities associated with early childhood provision, research, ethics, and pedagogy. For instance, according to Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1997; 2007), the postmodern term ‘the image of the child’ was proposed to demonstrate and further explore a disruption of the mainstream image of the child prevalent in the Anglo-American early childhood literature because the term itself has underlined “standardized and predetermined child outcomes and disregards the child’s social importance by marginalizing and limiting his/her being as an object or product of education” (p. 63).

The paradigmatic discourses that currently exist in the field of ECEC have shifted the meaning of the concept of the child as a social agent by allowing cultural, economic, and political forces to sanction a self-serving use of this term. The myriad of discourses regarding the image of the child have nonetheless encountered serious challenges in clearly defining the role of the child in curriculum decision-making processes. Therefore, there has also been an increasing demand to revisit paradigmatic interpretations of the concept of the child as a social agent. As
Moss et al. (2016) explain, the issue becomes even more complicated if one considers that the external factors of economic globalization in today’s world have persistently substituted the image of the *competent child* with *the image of a child* with *developmentally appropriate competencies* and *school-oriented skills development*.

**Young Children’s Participation**

Early childhood literature, research and educational initiatives have promoted young children’s participation as well as addressed challenges to its implementation (Swadener, Lundy, Habashi, & Blanchet-Cohen, 2013). Woodhead (2006, 2010) is one among a number of educational scholars who speaks in support of young children’s right to participate while locating this concept in a paradigm of human rights or rights-based approach. Labelling the human rights perspective as ‘a new and much more inclusive paradigm’, Woodhead (2006) acknowledges that this paradigm seeks to confront the mainstream universalistic accounts of the developmental perception as well as challenge the cultural relativity of the socio-constructivist perspective. In view of such declarations, Woodhead (2006) argues that all previously identified paradigms “have their roots in theories and research spanning the biological and social sciences, [but] human rights draws on quite different ethical and legal principles, which inform as much as being informed by research” (p. 24). Thus, according to Woodhead (2006) the human rights paradigm is acclaimed for its emphasis on ‘public dialogue and call for action’. While some global scholars agree with Woodhead, the others may oppose his views by arguing that young children’s participation is a live concept that is present in many if not all available educational and research paradigms.

To shed a light on these assumptions, the following section provides a brief overview of the modern, constructivist, postmodern, and critical paradigms’ philosophical views. Then, it
explains how these paradigms shape ECEC curricula and how the proposed curricula describe the concept of the image of the child. Each paradigm undergoes a critique to elucidate its philosophical inconsistencies and educational drawbacks.

**Paradigms, Curricula, and the Image of the Child**

**Modern Paradigm**

*Overview*

Modern or modernism as a paradigm is based on rationality and science. Modernism is an evasive yet compelling concept that is at times used interchangeably with positivism (Thomas, 2005). In ECEC, the modernist paradigm encompasses a wide range of scientific clusters – from ethology to behaviourism, from psychodynamics to developmentalism, and ultimately to eclectic/dynamic systems theory approaches in psychology. All of these clusters are believed to be embedded in positivist logic. The central argument of modernism in ECEC is that there is an objective reality which can and should be measured and this reality is rooted in empirical evidence. Modernism as such encompasses an array of universal beliefs about how young children develop and how they should be educated (Thomas, 2005). In particular, the science of psychology which is situated at the heart of modernism is believed to have had a long-standing influence on the formation of early childhood curriculum theory where:

theories of child development […] have grown at an increasing pace as biologists and psychologists [of the 20th century] who traditionally focused their attention on the behaviour of animal species have been directly studying the manifestation of human genetic potentials with diverse habitats. (Thomas, 2005, p. 471)
Modernism reinforces programmed (theme-based) and educator-directed (activity planning) approaches in children’s learning and development. The application of ethology, specifically Darwin’s theories of evolution and natural selection, has proven to be a powerful influence in interpreting childhood and children’s development and learning. Darwin is considered by some developmental psychologists to be the “forefather of scientific child study” (Berk, 2014, p. 11).

In the 1950s, Gesell’s theory advanced the notion that developmentalism is a predictable biological process primarily determined by genetic potential. The original categories identified by Gesell have been modified into developmental milestones and/or indicators and are widely used to measure the child’s normal and/or typical physical behaviours. These measures were extensively adopted in order to prepare children for school. The Gesell Institute of Human Development continued to embrace age-appropriate practices throughout the 1970s and 1980s. More specifically, the institute conducted research related to age-appropriate toys (materials), books, routines, and teaching techniques (Ames & Haber, 1985).

The ethological attachment theory as proposed by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1991) has influenced educators’ interpretations of how to create authentic relationships and bond with children in child care settings (Gestwicki, 2011; Thomas, 2005). This is while Skinner’s theories pertaining to behaviour continue to justify the use of control techniques in ECEC curricula. For instance, educators use activities like time-outs to give children time to “refresh feelings, and ponder socially desirable responses in similar circumstances” (Readdick & Chapman, 2000, p. 81). The time-out tactic has been altered to include rewards including stickers in order to reinforce the child’s positive behaviour and motivate learning. Bandura’s proposition regarding modeling behaviour through social experiences or social modeling compels early childhood
educators to transition into positive role models for the children and create positive peer relations (Ross, 2007). According to Gestwicki (2011), Skinner and Bandura’s research findings continue to impact educators by enabling them to help children eliminate egocentric behaviours and gain behavioural control. This is meant to help children develop skills like active listening, understanding natural and logical sequences, and the overall fostering of self-control. For preschoolers, for instance, educators must “teach very important lessons by living the behaviours they want children to adopt [because] children want to be like their beloved adults” (Gestwicki, 2011, p. 284). It is believed that when educators come to children with suggestions regarding which activities and behaviours are more appropriate, it creates a space for children to redirect and reconsider their behaviours before they move beyond socially acceptable norms (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2004).

Freud and Erikson’s theories have found their way into the early childhood curriculum as well through the identification of stages in problem-solving and conflict resolution (Dodge, Cilker & Heroman, 2002; Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). Inspired by these theories, some early childhood curriculum developers have designed steps to guide children through the process of resolving conflict situations. Aside from a few exceptions, the steps recommended for educators to undertake include (1) approaching social conflict calmly and acknowledging children’s feelings, (2) gathering information and restating the problem, (3) asking for ideas, choosing the most appropriate idea as a team, and being prepared to offer follow-up support (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). Other steps in this process include (1) helping children calm down, (2) identifying the problem, (3) generating possible solutions, (4) reviewing solutions and choosing the most appropriate one, (4) checking back, (5) discussing the situation, (6) encouraging everyone to contribute, (8) making plans, and (9) assessing the results (Dodge, Cilker, &
Heroman, 2002). In the context of conflict resolution, socially inappropriate behaviours, physical aggression, biting, temper tantrums, bullying, etc. are identified and explained to the children. These behaviours, as Kostelnik, Soderman, and Whiren (2004) suggest, need to be eliminated with the use of behaviour management strategies and positive guidance that are imbedded in every-day curriculum planning.

Curriculum

Stage theories play a central role in designing modernist early childhood curricula which are known to have a highly managerial agenda and a linear perspective toward the young child’s development. A linear perspective of the growth of a child and assessing a child’s “normal” development in socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical domains has powerful implications for practice. Several of the aforementioned theories have been utilized to create either theme-based or play-based curricula which provide educators with teaching manuals and guide them on how to reflect on their practices with children. Instances of a theme-based curriculum in action include the implementation of the Curiosity Corner for preschoolers and KinderCorner for kindergartners. Both curricula have been developed by the Success for All Foundation (2012) to promote language and literacy development. The Curiosity Corner is an early childhood education program centred on “18 integrated two-week thematic units that relate to children’s lives, interests, and surroundings” (Success for All Foundation, 2012, para. 5). Additionally, each preschool teacher is provided with a teacher’s manual that contains well-structured thematic units “aligned with state and national early learning guidelines” (Success for All Foundation, 2012, para. 6). Another example of a theme-based curriculum can be found in the Frog Street Pre-K program, which advocates a joyful approach to learning in the curriculum (Frog Street, 2014). Similar to the Curiosity Corner, this curriculum equips preschool teachers
with manuals that contain detailed descriptions of the materials as well as pre-packed aid kits to help deliver pre-designed thematic units. These manuals include the *Frog Street Pre-K Instructional Strategies Research* manual and *Dr. Becky Bailey’s Conscious Discipline* guide (Frog Street, 2014). All manuals are set to guide early childhood teachers’ instructive pedagogy while also advancing the central tenets of modern curriculum design. Within a modern early childhood curriculum, the child is understood as a scholar who is in the process of becoming a competent grown-up.

**Image of the child**

Modernists view childhood as a sociobiological stage in the evolutionary chain of human development. Hence, the child is understood and treated as a human becoming. Terminologies used in the theoretical approaches of maturation, behaviorism, psychoanalysis, or latter humanisms include terms such as *objectivity, seamlessness, norm, neutrality, order, and schoolreadiness*. The pedagogical terms imbued in the modernist discourse can be summed up as follows: the child is progressing through the different stages of development; the child is guided through learning and learning is controlled; the child is dominated by and dependent on an adult; the child is obedient and follows instructions; the child is praised/ reinforced and punished depending on the type of demonstrated behavior; the child is at risk of physical, emotional, and psychological harm and is therefore vulnerable and in need of constant supervision; the child is not experienced and rational, therefore s/he is not considered knowledgeable and is in need of psychological and educational intervention; the child is observable and therefore predictable (Bredekamp, 1986; Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2003; Moss, 2007; 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015).
Critique

The plethora of modern views on educating young children have been met with extensive criticism. Driven by modernist theories, the field of early childhood education has embraced the notion of developmental norms and controlled learning in pursuit of linear progress and development. It has demonstrated a strong commitment to measurable and quantifiable indicators that lead to self-productivity and self-efficacy in young children (Gestwicki, 2011; Bredekamp, 2014; Shonkoff, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shaffer, Kipp, Wood, & Willoughby, 2012). The deconstruction and rejection of a number of modernist ontologies has engendered a much broader understanding of the field of ECEC and has led to a critical discourse toward a host of early childhood issues where learning is viewed as a complex and multifaceted process (Burman, 1994; Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot, & Weyenberg, 2006; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1997; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009; Mac Naughton, 2003; 2005; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Prochner, 2013; Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Taguchi, 2010).

A predisposition toward empirical findings and the use of measurable developmental indicators have led to a perception of early childhood curriculum as therapeutic, controlling, and instrumental. In this vein, narratives and in-depth interpretations have been replaced with checklists and standardized tests alongside brief anecdotes (Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot, & Weyenberg, 2006). In this vein, the language of an early childhood curriculum becomes universalized, that is, it is expected to apply to all instances.

Historically, critical theorizing concerning the developmental understanding of the child started as early as the 1970s and gained greater momentum and recognition in the 1990s. Specifically, childhood studies in fields like anthropology, sociology, and critical insight in
developmental psychology improved considerably during that particular period (Burman, 1998). These fields drew insight from critical theory (Frankfurt School), philosophical analyses of the role of discursive language, as well as “feminist, postcolonial, decolonizing, liberatory pedagogical, [and] political-economic…” discourses (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014, p. 4). Overall, these disciplines brought a critical lens to childhood studies by challenging the existence of “one scientific truth” about the child. The problematization of empirical findings and their application to early childhood pedagogy, as well as disrupting the dominance of one universal language in interpreting the child also paved the way for a critical deconstruction of modernist discourses. The notion of “one truth”, which has become a “regime of truth […] that regulates and governs what is appropriate or correct way to understand and organize young children”, led to the conception of mechanical and neutral early childhood curricula that sought to normalize, classify, and regulate children (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 33). The modernist discourse offered a regime of truth (Foucault, 1984) that continues to inspire educators to develop instrumentalist teaching manuals that ensure social regulation, including how to discipline a child (e.g. time outs); how to “normalize” a child’s learning (e.g. motivational stickers); and how to simplify early childhood pedagogy and reduce it to methods of teaching (e.g. theme kits). Normalization of the child creates a curriculum that “allows little to no room for the child actively to make a choice and so it ignores the possibility that children may resist the role models and social experiences that they encounter” (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 36).

To summarize, in the modernist discourse, the pedagogical vocabulary in early childhood curricula is replete with such terms as promoting development; schoolreadiness; early intervention; children in need; children at risk, disadvantaged groups of children; self-efficacy; behavior management; knowledge and power control; desirable outcomes; regulation,
standards, etc. (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1997, 2007; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

**Constructivist Paradigm**

**Overview**

Acknowledging the instrumentalist nature and superficial objectivism of the modernist era has challenged the field of early childhood education and made it transition into the ‘other’ paradigm – a constructivist paradigm with the fundamental goal of revisiting the purely ethological and highly managerial agenda of modernism. The constructivist paradigm recognizes and includes discourses about the inclusion of cultural and individual essentialities of the child and integrates them in early childhood curriculum design by advocating for child-centered learning spaces where the child is the co-creator and co-constructor of his/her own learning experience. Constructivism is understood as a doctrine that thrives in an intermediary space between modern and postmodern paradigms. Constructivism has a penchant for traditional views specifically those related to social orders (Popkewitz, 1998). In light of these considerations, constructivism has been closely associated with modernism particularly because it emerged “within a period of intense modernization that involved the industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization that we now associate with modernity and the modern Western welfare state” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 537). In retrospect, it also embodies a more critical view of human beings as active constructors of new knowledge as opposed to passive recipients of knowledge. Constructivism encourages the development of narratives that are based on the individual’s life experiences, which manifest themselves when individuals share their stories. Individuals’ narratives and/or stories are understood as interpretations of a reality through the prism of human
consciousness (Bakhtin, 1986). Constructivism in education is primarily represented by different theoretical approaches where radical, social, developmental, personal construct psychology, and relational constructivist approaches come together to explore knowledge formation.

In ECEC, constructivism is broadly known as a “learner-centered theory of knowing which proposes that children actively build their own knowledge by interacting with the world” (Follari, 2007, p. 69). Constructivism in ECEC encompasses two polar views of developmental, deeply ethological, social, and culturally oriented perspectives. In light of these variations which are dependent on epistemic theoretical values, constructivism in ECEC holds that “[p]edagogy is a practice of social administration of an individual” where “administration of the child embodies certain norms about the inner capabilities from which the child can become self-governing and self-reliant” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 536). In this respect, developmental constructivism focuses on individualism and developmentalism with an emphasis on creating rich educational spaces that stimulate learning. Meanwhile, socio-cultural constructivism, often referred to as constructionism, stresses the pragmatic, interactive, interpretive, and collaborative aspects of education (Mac Naughton, 2003).

Hence, it can be inferred that constructivism in ECEC proposes a somewhat dichotomous rather than complementary view of how to educate children (pedagogy) and design learning environments (curriculum). Bennett (2005) referred to these dichotomous views as pre-primary and social pedagogical traditions. The constructivist paradigm in ECEC creates a set of pedagogical terms that can be just as similar as they are contradictory. These terms are widely used to describe the pedagogical processes involved in educating young children and offer guidance to educators in their decisions regarding early childhood curriculum structure and implementation.
Curriculum

Some of the pedagogical terms prevalent in the constructivist paradigm have become central to constructing effective practices for mainstream preschool education. For instance, the pedagogical terms of age appropriateness, scaffolded learning in small groups, planned activities, developmental assessments of children’s competencies, and schoolreadiness are essentially utilized in the early learning framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Copple & Bredekamp, 1987; 1997; 2009). This is while some of the other terms such as competent child, narrative pedagogy, documentation, responsive and emergent planning, sense of belonging, exploration and expression, and reflective practices are concepts that have only recently been implemented in the field of ECEC. Bennett (2005) and Woodhead (2006) have attributed historical and cultural significance to the utilization of some of these terms and the overlooking of others.

In the Western world of early childhood education, DAP is considered to be a “tool to help practitioners and policy makers distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate teaching practices with young children, regardless of the curriculum approach under review” (Goffin, 2000, p. 2). Despite the advisory nature of the DAP document, prominent curriculum models including High/Scope, Creative Curriculum, and Tools of the Mind follow DAP’s guidelines to the letter. The central objective of these models is to organize the curricula around the different stages of cognitive development. For instance, a so-called curriculum sequence has been put in place, characterized by a set of predictable and guided activities regarding where an educator can and should intervene in the child’s play to become a ‘play-partner’. Curriculum elements such as the Plan-Do-Review sequence (High Scope preschool curriculum), Choice Time (Creative Curriculum), and Play Planning with the implementation of scaffolded writing followed by
Make-believe Play (Tools of the Mind) are the three main segments of planning, implementation, and recall that are normally delivered in a sequential manner (Follari, 2007). These curriculum elements aim to develop the children’s verbal, writing, and numerical skills through play-based learning. Specifically, during planning time (a 10 - to 15-minute period), children are asked to choose what area(s) they are interested to play in, what materials they are planning to use, and which friends they intend to play with. Children are also expected to indicate their intentions either verbally or in writing. In High/Scope, educators use various props such as monocles, telephones, cars, etc. for children to engage with in the planning stage. The children are encouraged to point out the play area, name the area, or write down the play area’s name (High/Scope, 2012). In the Tools of the Mind approach, educators use the Scaffolded Writing strategy to engage children in “talking, drawing, and writing” (Bodrova & Leon, 2009, p. 228).

In the Creative Curriculum, Choice Time begins with an activity where educators “guide children in selecting interest areas” (Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002, p. 94). The implementation of these activities or free-play time provides the longest time block in daily routines lasting from 45 to 60 minutes. During this time, children can freely explore the materials, communicate with their peers and educators, and carry out their own plans.

In all three models, the educator is expected to be a play-partner throughout play time. In the Tools of the Mind model, educators are required to “support children’s use of play-related vocabulary” and “imaginary use of unstructured and multi-functional props [as well as] children’s development of pretend scenarios” (Bodrova & Leong, 2009, p. 225). The High/Scope model recommends that educators:

- observe children to see how they gather information, interact with peers, and solve problems. Following this routine, educators are advised to insert themselves into the
children’s activities and scaffold learning by encouraging, extending, setting up problem-solving situations, and engaging in conversation with them. (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2009, p. 195)

The Creative Curriculum model demands that educators “observe and interact with individual children to extend play and learning” (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002, p. 94). The final phase (a 10- to 15-minute period) of the three-step sequence is comprised of review time in the form of small-group activity. Throughout this exercise, children summarize and communicate the experiences they have gained during work/play time.

The abovementioned curriculum models equip educators with teaching manuals that contain a set of didactic recommendations and provide educators with a variety of kits to help develop the children’s literacy and mathematic skills. The level of the children’s development is monitored through the implementation of standardized observational assessments. For example, Child Observation Record (High/Scope Research Foundation, 2012), Developmental Continuum (Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies, 2002-2012), and Preschool Sequence (Core Knowledge, 2012) were developed for teachers to assess the children’s developmental and academic progress. For instance, the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (2005) maintains:

The goals and objectives of The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool give you direction for planning a developmentally appropriate program and a guide for determining how all children are progressing in four areas of development: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language. The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3–5 outlines the typical development of preschool-age children by describing the steps that children usually take as they achieve each of 50 objectives (p. 3).
These observational tools correspond to predetermined outcomes: Key Developmental Experiences (High/Scope) and Developmental Continuum (Creative Curriculum). This is further indication that many DAP-centred ECE curriculum models are grounded in “context-free” academic-oriented laws (Cole, 1996). As such, the ECE curriculum in the context of DAP is “academic-enough-oriented”, measurable, structured, and “emphasize predictability, acceptance, and responsiveness” where educators “intentionally engage children” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 128).

Regardless of existing differences in pedagogy, constructivism in ECEC strives to blend two constructivist approaches by linking them “through common theoretical ‘genes’” of developmental and socio-cultural constructivism (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 177). The outcome is the birth of two pedagogical traditions that co-exist in ECEC: pre-primary and social pedagogical as defined by Bennett (2005) or Culturally Appropriate Practice (CAP) and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as suggested by Woodhead (2006). One of the outcomes of the two pedagogical traditions is the emergence of two sets of pedagogical vocabularies that are representative of two polar views. On the one hand, the constructivist paradigm is very vocal about schoolreadiness while simultaneously promoting socialization (Bennett, 2005; Woodhead, 2006). In this regard, developmental constructivism supports DAP, the pre-primary tradition, and schoolreadiness while placing a strong emphasis on the development of cognitive skills. In contrast, socio-cultural constructivism adheres to CAP and advocates for the social pedagogy tradition placing the concept of “building relationships” at its core. In an effort to unite the tow existing polar views of DAP vs. CAP and pre-primary vs. social pedagogical tradition, the constructivist paradigm imposes two perspectives on understanding children and children’s role in curriculum decision-making.
Image of the child

The duality of definitions prevalent in the constructivist paradigm has led to the creation of a dual image of the child. On the one hand, there is a predominantly traditional view of children as isolated, vulnerable, and powerless individuals. On the other hand, there is the image of the child as a being who is creatively intuitive, powerful, and competent with a strong sense of agency. Some constructivist pedagogical terms that shape the image of the child include: the child is a scientist; the child is an active learner; the child is a protagonist; the child is an intentional learner; the child creates his/her own meaning; the child is a competent learner; the child is a learner with competencies; the child as a becoming citizen; the child is an individual who belongs to the community; the child is in need of constructing more complex and abstract concepts; the child is vulnerable and in need of guidance and protection by mature adults; the child is a play partner with other children and adults; the child is the focus of the curriculum process; the child is an observable subject in a natural (early childhood) setting; the child’s learning is and must be scaffolded; the child is an object of an early educational intervention; the child is a person who uses multiple forms of symbolic representation to communicate his/her learning experiences and to build relationships with others (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987; Folarri, 2007; Gronlund & James, 2013; Gregory, Rupiper, Kostelnik, Whiren, & Soderman, 2014; Mac Naughton, 2003;).

The variation in the images construed for the child is indicative of yet another binary in the constructivist paradigm about children’s learning and development. These images can simultaneously be deemed as similar and conflicting depending on how they are interpreted and what meanings or approaches are associated with them, whether developmental or socio-cultural.
Critique

According to Popkewitz (1998), constructivism involves educators in “discursive imaginaries” that bare some reflections of the image of the child as a social, competent agent. Popkewitz (1998) contends that such discursive imaginaries create academically neutral relationships as opposed to critical and social ones. Constructivism produces a ‘mind/society binary relationship’ and prevents educators from transcending the image of the child as a self-regulating young scholar preparing for school by mastering skills such as numeracy, literacy, and problem-solving. This, in part, happens because the psychological theories of the forefathers of the constructivist approach, Piaget and Vygotsky, have been trivialized and ideologically disconnected from the field of pedagogy in different cultural contexts. The disconnect helps sustain traditional educational systems and cultivates a culture of “pedagogical determinism” while maintaining the universal image of the ‘normal’ child (Cannella, 1997; Popkewitz, 1998; von Glasersfeld, 2000). In addition, constructivism continues to promote a universalist, monological, developmental, diachronic, learner-centered, decontextualized, and activity-oriented learning environment (Matusov, 2011). These spaces define the child learner through his/her consciousness and academically oriented activity mediations (i.e., play).

According to Cannella (1997), the institutionalized language of constructivism is seen as a tool for creating ongoing opportunities to support and maintain what has been known as the one universal truth of ‘normality’ in child development and learning, which is in line with the modern paradigm. Such vocabulary purposefully omits the principles of social construction in favor of one objective scientific truth. As Cannella (1997) claims, institutionalized language constructs “may not have directly recognized as part of our constructed world, briefly describing hidden assumption(s) within each concept, and the potential influence of the use of concept in
various human beings” (p. 104-105). To this end, the majority of early childhood scholars whose views are rooted in constructivism conform to the commonly-used pedagogical terms such as child-centered pedagogy, pedagogy of choice, and play-based learning, utilizing them both in the learning framework documents and in everyday pedagogical practices. The frequent use of these terms congeals constructivism as an educational paradigm and demonstrates that the young child’s progressive academic efficiency through the means of developmental/maturationist learning is required as a form of “product control” to secure political and economic goals (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Fendler, 2001; Hultquvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009). Thus, it can be claimed that the constructivist paradigm envisions ECEC as the first step towards the progressive institutionalization of a child. As Kessler (2014) explains, constructivism promotes “skill-oriented curriculum and indicates that this response [is] a political one” (p. 36). In other words, the constructivist paradigm has substituted its progressive, socially-oriented ideas in favour of political and economic demands that dictate to educators “what skills needed [for young children] to be mastered to meet the needs of the then-current workforce, those skills would become the objectives of the curriculum” (Kessler, 2014, p. 37).

Subsequently, a pedagogy that embodies the power of logical thought measures young children’s abilities through a set of pre-defined learning/developmental outcomes and/or indicators and requires standardized observational tools and checklists utilized in ECEC to measure children’s ability to self-regulate, as well as their level of attachment, mental health, and social-emotional development to ensure that children are prepared to enter school (Zaslow, Martinez-Beck, Tout, & Halle, 2011). In response to standardization, postmodern and critical scholars argue that a scientific perception of young children has had dire consequences including “‘giving up’ on some children and ‘blaming’ the brain for behaviours that maybe a product of
social and political experiences” (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 65). In such a setting, constructivism tends to reproduce a perception of the “governed child” and conform to academic excellence where pedagogical practices related to social justice are replaced with cognitive control and academic efficacy (Burman, 2008). Therefore, pedagogical terms prevalent in the constructivist paradigm greatly vary from age appropriateness, scaffolded learning, planned activities, developmental assessments of children’s competencies and schoolreadiness to competent child, narrative pedagogy, documentation, responsive and emergent planning, sense of belonging, exploration, and expression.

**Postmodern Paradigm**

**Overview**

Postmodernism is comprised of a variety of theories and approaches, including post-colonialism, poststructuralism, and feminism. These approaches yield to discourses about social order, power/knowledge relationships, colonialism, gender, and dominance and invite researchers, educators, and policy makers to espouse a transformative understanding of concepts like unitary reality, truth, and the child (Hultqvist & Dahlber, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2008; Taguchi, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Prochner, 2013; Sellers, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Postmodernism offers a complex and challenging space where notions like reconceptualization, deconstruction, subjectivity, and context manifest themselves in dynamic ways. The postmodern paradigm has seeped into social and educational constructs and disrupted the comfort zone of early childhood educators, calling for a re-envisioning of the field of early childhood. In this context, Mac Naughton (2003) argues that social constructivism has paved a path to a postmodern comprehension of the child in early
childhood education by introducing the ‘new sociology of childhood’ that addresses social issues (James, Curtis, Birch, 2008; James & Prout, 1995). Postmodernism, according to Mac Naughton (2003), is different from social constructionism in that it

refers both to an era and to a way of thinking about a world. As a way of thinking about the world, it attempts to subvert modern ways of thinking, so it is called ‘post’ modern to indicate that it is separate from the modern and succeeds it (p. 71).

Postmodernism as an independent and competing paradigm builds on the works of such thinkers\(^2\) as Foucault (1926-1984), Levinas (1906-1995), Derrida (1930-2004), and Deleuze

\(^2\) The central concept of deconstructive readings and/or processes as modelled by French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls for the reconstruction of binary concepts (e.g. men/women, true/false, subject/object, etc.) in society so as to drive individuals to construct new meanings (Taguchi, 2008). Dahlberg and Moss (2007) expand on this notion and assert: “For us, as pedagogues with whom we have worked and for Derrida, deconstruction has functioned as kind of affirmation, a listening and engagement. It can be seen as a form of hospitality with means a welcoming of the Other. For each question one has to open oneself to difference – to welcome the stranger – which is an affirmation, a yes, yes, yes to the Other, as well as an affirmation of the alterity of existence” (p.64).

The notion of ‘alterity of existence’ is closely connected to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of becoming-minoritarian or minor, which inspires a “becoming other in ourselves – becoming transformed” into someone or something. In the context of early childhood education, this translates into the educator’s desire to transform into a child, becoming-child, so as to accept, understand, and acknowledge the role of someone else [child] over their own. The transformative process that embodies a transition from who they are into who they can possibly become is “what becoming-minoritarian is about” (Taguchi, 2010, p. 172). ‘Becoming-minoritarian’ and accepting ‘alterity of existence’ mean to problematize and eliminate one’s dominance and/or power. The concept of power was discussed at length in the philosophical works of Michel Foucault (1977) who addressed issues of social control, “regimes of truth that governs us”, and states of “normality” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 36). The application of these ideas to the field of early childhood, has propelled educators to revisit their beliefs regarding unitary developmental truths as it pertains to early childhood education and disrupt constructivist perceptions of how to interact with children. Such re-evaluation will impact educators’ understanding of issues such as child-rearing and early childhood pedagogy, as well as provision and ethics. Foucault’s works have had a tremendous influence on educators by inviting them to ask important questions such as, “How should we think, act and feel to be “true” early childhood educators and to prove to ourselves and others that we are “true believers” in early childhood” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 39). In addition to Foucault, the centrality of constructivist and hermeneutic perspectives have been established in the works of Emmanuel Levinas as the poststructuralist thinker who inspired educators to rethink ethics in the context of childhood education (Dahlberg & Moss, 2008; Sellers, 2013). Accordingly, Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1997) reason: “Levinas proposes ethics in the place of philosophy, in particular the ethical as the injunction of responsibility for the other. He argues that philosophy has been so bound to the rational project of seeking justice in terms of regimes of truth or self-knowledge that it has become incapable of respecting the being and meaning of the other to the extent that philosophical tradition makes ‘common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same’” (p. 39). As Dahlberg and Moss (2007) later conclude, Levinas ought to refrain from ‘grasping’ and converting the Other [child] into the Same in early childhood education. Levinas had proposed that educators accept and comprehend the alterity of the ‘other’ so as to leave room for novelty, wonder, and creative encounter. Encounter, novelty, and wonder are among central themes in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conceptual creation, the rhizome: “The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. […] In contrast to centered
(1925-1995), establishing that early childhood pedagogy must be understood through the prism of the local, “because as we try to generalize our understandings, we rely on ‘big pictures’ or ‘grand narratives’ about humanity’s ‘progress’ or its ‘journey’ that are inaccurate and simplistic” (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 73). In this vein, postmodern writers argue that we can and should view each society as “incoherent and discontinuous” (Hughes, 2001). Postmodern scholars push for a deconstruction of our view of society as well as suggest to accept and welcome the other “in order for dominant meanings not to be normalizing and oppressive” (Taguchi, 2008, p. 53).

Curriculum

From the postmodern perspective, expanding our understanding of early childhood discourses is reliant upon the decentralization of early childhood pedagogy as interpreted by Dahlberg and Moss (2005). Adopting the contextual approach introduces an element of dynamicity that incites postmodern scholars to place greater emphasis on process rather than product. To affirm the postmodern paradigm shift, scholars have engaged in extensive discussions about quality education through socially negotiated meaning-making practices and challenging concepts like early educational intervention and schoolreadiness (Pinar, 2004; Slattery, 2006; Cameron & Moss, 2007; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; 2014; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010; Palaiologou, 2012)

Postmodern scholars who have systematically challenged and deconstructed mainstream views about the child as an object of educational psychology have inspired educators to revisit their positions on early childhood education. Such re-evaluation will impact their understanding

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(even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory of central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states” (p.23).
of issues related to early childhood pedagogy, as well as to provision and ethics. Foucault’s works have had tremendous influence on educators by inviting them to ask important questions such as, “How should we think, act and feel to be ‘true’ early childhood educators and to prove to ourselves and others that we are “true believers” in early childhood” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 39).

Contemporary postmodern early childhood scholars understand early childhood curriculum as a rhizome and pedagogy as multilayered, provoking, and transforming. As Sellers (2013) puts it: “A rhizome comprises ceaseless interrelation movements – flows of connectivity – among numerous possible assemblies of the desperate and similar” (p. 11). In other words, the idea of the rhizome offers endless possibilities to create flows and movements within a curriculum by establishing relational connections between the unreasonable and reasonable; the convergent and divergent. A rhizomatic curriculum espouses an intra-active pedagogy that is “inclusive of children’s and students’ thinking and different strategies and ways of doing, as well as their subject positionings on the margins of social class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality” (Taguchi, 2010, p. 9). An early childhood curriculum inspired by the Deleuzian rhizome “becomes an opportunity to resist, to make meaning, and to search out other (invisible, out-of-sight) meanings” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, p. xiii).

Engaging with an inclusive ECEC curriculum also requires the utilization of pedagogical narrations as a mechanism for thinking critically and reflectively. Specifically, pedagogical narration is “a way to make children’s learning visible as educators make decisions about curriculum development” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 114). Pedagogical narrations are reflective of both the children’s and educators’ works and invite educators to reflect and question, deconstruct and experiment, as well as collaborate and engage in dialogue. Here,
dialogue is understood as a process that involves multiple voices of those who are involved in the process of education including children who pronounce their ideas using various modes of expression. Dialogue, in this context, is not solely driven by semiotics as it establishes that “each encounter has its own context and meaning” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2010, p. 12). Rooted in contextualized and decentralized reasoning, followers of the postmodern paradigm have gone on to create their own ‘image of the child’.

**Image of the child**

In the postmodern discourse, the image of the postmodern child is a ‘protagonist’ – ‘rich in potential’, a competent individual in his/her own right. Pacini-Ketchabaw and her colleagues (2015) have offered a brief account of how children should be viewed in the context of postmodernity: the child is curious, competent, rich, and full of potential (Rinaldi, 1993); the child has a voice as a citizen and member of a social group (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2002); the child is an agent of their own lives (Moss & Petrie, 2005); and the child is a co-constructors of knowledge, identity, and culture who constantly make meaning of their lives and the world (James & Prout, 1997).

Accordingly, the term ‘the image of the child’ has gradually expanded to the image of the competent child by encompassing a number of subsidiary concepts ranging from ‘alternative’ to mainstream. The term itself was coined to disrupt the notion of one dominant psychological image of a child-in-training and to promote ‘innovative’ and ‘novice’ understandings of the complexities associated with early childhood pedagogy.

Dahlberg and Moss (2005, 2008, 2013) expand on the proposed image of the child, arguing that in today’s world this notion is a political question constructed through different
power structures including various forms of intervention, marketization, and commercialization of early childhood education. Adding to this construct, Moss and Fielding (2011) point to the inevitable connectivity between the image of the child and the image of the school. These scholars contend that schools can either be “impersonal, affective and of high performance and efficacy” or “person-centred learning communities and agents of democratic fellowship” (Moss & Fielding, 2011, p. 54). In light of presently existing polar views on the role of schools and children, the image of the child varies depending on the nature of the institution as well as the pedagogies employed, which generally embody fundamentally different philosophical assumptions.

It can thus be concluded that postmodern discourses generate their own distinct vocabulary about ‘the image of the child’. The child in the postmodern milieu is an active, social agent who is capable of embracing transformation in the context of educational institutions and society. Therefore, in the postmodern discourse, pedagogical terms such as belonging, divergent thinking, rhizomatic curriculum, narrative pedagogy, pedagogy of listening and care, and new ethics of childhood research are among a myriad of concepts that are pronounced.

A question at the heart of this analysis, however, is whether the social issues of gender, class, and culture have been effectively addressed by the postmodern paradigm in which each educator creates his/her own image of the child.

**Critique**

The postmodern drive to release knowledge from the shackles of the prevailing modern discourse has been met with stiff criticism over its presumed irrationality and lack of objectivity (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). While the concepts of ‘multiversity’ and decentralization in
postmodern discourses are set to replace modernist objectivity and universality, in reality, it fails to break the modernist hegemony of power and control. Postmodern interpretations of reality have indeed been depicted as abstractive assumptions that lack counterstrategy in addressing political and social issues (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001) state:

Postmodernists—whose work now composes the fountainhead of radical educational critique—frequently overlook the centrality of class warfare as the overarching mechanism that inscribes individuals and groups in the reproduction of social relations of exploitation under capitalism [presently known as neoliberalism]. (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001, p. 142).

The lack of consensus and evidence on addressing the social issues of class, gender, and cultural struggles in the postmodern camp has proven to be problematic in unifying the ECEC postmodern paradigm (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). Postmodern scholars continued to reproduce opposing constructs by extending on an intellectual project of social constructivism that promotes the possibility of binary relationships (Popkewitz, 1998). In this vein, postmodern educationalists have left practitioners adrift when confronted with the realities of teaching by merely trading in critiquing modernism to proposing postmodernism or critiquing ‘the child in need’ to proposing ‘the image of the competent child’ (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1997; Moss, 2013, 2014). These binary constructs stand in contrast to postmodern philosophy and do not leave adequate space to either deconstruct present realities or to comprise the central concept in Derrida’s deconstruction; and the ‘other’. Hence, it is possible to say that ECEC postmodern scholars who constantly compare and contrast modernism with postmodernism result in further categorizations that become strongly associated with good and
bad. In this sense, these scholars fail to fully embrace Derrida’s concept of deconstruction because deconstruction as a particular practice and a method of critique rejects “binary opposition” where one concept/discourse ultimately prevails the other (Derrida, 2003).

**Critical Paradigm**

*Overview*

To transcend the longstanding philosophical and hermeneutic controversies impacting different paradigms, educational researchers and scholars have proposed the adoption of critical, critical-theoretical, and participatory paradigms. The move is aimed at offering support to educators’ social pedagogical activities and inspiring them to embrace platforms that advocate social change through educational research and practice (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Critical thinking, as a way of reconceptualizing social order, emerged from the philosophical tradition of the German Frankfurt School of thought. According to Frankfurt School scholars, the positivist empirical practices of social science researchers lacked the sophistication to describe and accurately measure the different dimensions of human behavior despite claims to the contrary (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010). The framework provided by Jürgen Habermas (1929-present) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997) aspires to further advance themes related to philosophy, education, and democracy inspired by the best works of some of the most prominent critical thinkers of our time. Accordingly, renowned scholars the like of Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Joe Kincheloe, Sheila Steinberg, Noah De Lissovoy, Gail Solan Cannella, Lourdes Diaz Soto, and Beth Blue Swadener who “had come of age in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s focused their scholarly attention on critical theory” (Steinberg with Kincheloe, 2010, p. 142). As explained by Cannella (2014), critical accounts in education and educational research still tend to
…recognize and acknowledge power relations, analyze the taken-for-granted to understand unjust and oppressive conditions, may attempt to illuminate hidden structures of power and/or intersecting oppressions, and are concerned with discourse practices (from language, to artifacts, to performances) that shape and limit perspectives, opportunities, inclusions, and exclusions (p. 254).

Kincheloe (2008) maintains that critical thinking in general and critical pedagogy in particular provide an opportunity to “disrupt and challenge the status quo” and lead to reconceptualization, transformation, and social change. According to Giroux (2011) reconceptualization, transformation, and social change are inseparable from classroom practices. In an increasingly neoliberal-leaning educational landscape, influential economic forces tend to favor educational systems without critical insight and in favor of mass privatization of public education, standardized testing, and competency-based teaching practices. The emergence of a culture of complacency that assumes a non-interventionist approach to issues pertaining to social justice has, however, not succeeded in silencing every possibility to problematize and destabilize the neoliberal logic. Critical pedagogy is among the voices that seek to disrupt the rationality that endorses the neoliberal vision of education by empowering educators to “become more attentive to the ways in which institutional forces and cultural power are tangled up with everyday experience” (Giroux, 2011, p. 123; McLaren, 2015).

The dynamic nature of critical theory and critical pedagogy engender a space where the reconceptualization of their core values corresponds to existing social, economic, political, educational, and research realities. Through empowerment and engagement in a critical paradigm individuals can work to gain control over their lives by questioning ‘unproblematic’
essentialities of Western democracy ‘in solidarity with a justice-oriented community’ (Steinberg, with Kincheloe, 2010).

Generally speaking, early childhood educators have been resistant to adopting a critical disposition that engages them in the political realm and have opted instead to focus on the psychological or pedagogical aspects of ECEC (Kincheloe, 2005). There are a number of factors that contribute to such resistance and the perception of schools as neutral social institutions. One of these factors is that early childhood educators’ (ECE) work with young children from zero-to-six years of age where political questions are deemed as irrelevant if not inappropriate. Pre-service ECEs are also not generally exposed to critical political thought that could empower them to connect their work in child care settings to the larger social context and analyze societal problems critically in relation to power, governmentality, institutionalization, and neoliberal-led privatization. Despite a paucity of research in the ECEC on political pedagogical praxis, the ECEC literature, instead, mainly focuses on two predominant discourses of modern worldviews incorporating developmental and social constructivist views versus postmodern/postfoundational worldviews (Kincheloe, 2005).

It is important to point out that the critical paradigm in ECEC is informed by the postmodern paradigm where scholars and researchers have extensively cited the works of critical pedagogues. For instance, Mac Naughton (2005) makes a reference to McLaren’s notions of “oppressive or inequitable teaching and learning processes” while elaborating on the concept of critical reflection and its importance for early childhood educators (p. 7). A brief foray into ECEC scholarship reveals that despite the implementation of the philosophies of critical pedagogues in espousing reconceptualization, referencing these intellectuals has been overshadowed by postmodern philosophers like Foucault. This trend has been attributed to the
larger geopolitical and economical relational constructs within which they are being
implemented and where “a critique of the field that challenged everything that we hold sacred
would not be popular” (Cannella, 1997, p. 157). In this milieu, the postmodern concepts of
“agonistic dialogue” as a “framework for thinking” (Moss, 2007, p. 235) and nurturing the self as
an ethical subject are rendered synonymous with the neoliberal discourse’s increased focus on
individualism and ‘subjectification of the self’. The postmodern ‘transforming position’ as a
technique to achieve personal goals and satisfactions needs to be reconsidered in juxtaposition to
humanism and solidarity which are in turn “the principles of justice, liberty and equality” (De
Lissovoy, 2008, p. 112). In this vein, Kessler and Hauser (2000) point to the need to engage in
critical praxis by incorporating a political curriculum, particularly because,

Early childhood educators are not accustomed to viewing the curriculum politically…

[But] in order to educate its young members, individuals in a particular social group must
collaborate to ensure that their children are educated in such a way so as to perpetuate the
interests of that particular collective… [which] leads to different perspectives as to how
education should be accomplished. (Kessler & Hauser, 2000, p. 60-61)

Although Woodhead (2006) stops short of directly addressing the importance of a critical
and reflective educator, he does underline the significance of the human rights paradigm in
embracing change and shaping societal understandings of young children’s participation.
Woodhead (2006) asserts that the human rights paradigm possesses dynamic and empowering
qualities.

Whereas international advocacy had in the past relied heavily on the power of scientific
evidence for young children’s universal nature, needs and development, the strength of
the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) rests on political consensus. This is a crucial distinction. (Woodhead, 2006, p. 24)

Contemporary ECEC academics have used both critical pedagogical terminologies as proposed by Gramsci and Freire and postmodern pedagogical terminologies as suggested by Foucault, in addressing the issues of power, hegemony, and dominance (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1997; Mac Naughton, 2005). This calls for a more in-depth examination of the rhetorico-philosophical polemics that co-exist between the critical and postmodern paradigms. Generally speaking, both paradigms share similar positions on issues pertaining to power, hegemony, and dominance. They underscore the importance of questioning existing power structures and tackling social inequalities in an effort to engender democratic relationships in early childhood education programs (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2003, 2015; Moss, 2014). However, there are well-noticed differences between theoretical frameworks of Gramsci and Freire and those provided by Foucault. While the Foucauldian perspective articulates a “self” oriented or individualistic orientation to criticism of power/knowledge relationships, Freirean critical pedagogical framework embodies a collective social nature. Accordingly, Foucault “proposes a genealogy of the self that includes examination of one ethical axis, or the components of self as moral agent” (Cannella, 2014, p. 259). This is while Freire advocates the notion of “liberation theology”, which incorporates a historical component in the collectivist struggle for an equal and just society (Steinberg with Kincheloe, 2010).

In summary, critical pedagogy represents the reaction of progressive educators against institutionalized functions. It is an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power about the false myths of opportunity and merit for
many students and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life. Some of the authors who continue their work in critical pedagogy have been strongly associated with the Freirean tradition. In the language of Critical Pedagogy, the critical person is one who is empowered to seek justice, to seek emancipation. Not only is the critical person adept at recognizing injustice but, for Critical Pedagogy, that person is also moved to change it. Here Critical Pedagogy wholeheartedly takes up Marx's Thesis XI on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx 1845/1977, 158) (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 50-51).

Curriculum

In accordance with the critical paradigm, so long as an educator remains critical of both local and global issues pertaining to education, the early childhood curriculum can possess emergent and rhizomatic qualities as proposed by constructivist and postmodern scholars. The critical paradigm reasons that as long as educators develop a multifaceted outlook through critical reflection and critical literacy skills and problematize the power relations that existe in ECEC, educators, are capable of creating learning environments where children’s voices are valued and reflected in practice. As Kincheloe (2005) denotes:

When advocates of the new [critical] paradigm enter diverse class cultures and racial/ethnic cultures they find childhoods that look quite different from the white, middle-/upper-middle class, English speaking one presented by positivism [modernism]. In these particularistic childhoods [critical] researchers find great complexity and diversity within these specific categories. For example, the social, cultural, and political
structures that shape these childhoods and the children who inhabit them are engaged in profoundly different ways by particular children in specific circumstances (p. xiii).

In a rapidly changing educational sphere, the critical paradigm seeks to incorporate curricula that moves beyond the one-size-fits-all construct. Contemporary curricula are often deemed to lack diversity as they are pre-established and fail to fully engage with alternative discourses. As Christensen and Aldridge (2013) clarify:

Truly, critical pedagogy is a personal, lifelong journey. It is qualitatively different for each early childhood and elementary teacher and candidate because every person has a unique worldview (Christensen & Aldridge, 2013, p.5).

In this vein, both educators and learners are viewed as competent, reflective human beings working together for the good of the society. According to Lazzari (2012), if educators in preschool settings position themselves as citizens who are actively engaged in their community, they tend to advocate a pedagogy in which civic and political engagement are strictly aligned. In these circumstances, pedagogy becomes democratic, engaging, and empowering and young children are viewed as citizens of today not tomorrow. Lazzari’s (2012) vision has been shaped by research on historical construction of the Reggio Emilia approach.

The Reggio Emilia approach is known for the demographic changes that followed the Second World War, when mass migration from rural to urban areas became a social issue when immigrant children were not expected to immediately take part in compulsory schooling. The voices of social movements active at the time were heard by regional and federal governmental authorities who eventually responded accordingly to the people’s needs and requests. As a result, preschool institutions were infused with the values of social movements, including peace and solidarity, and took a stand in support of equal educational opportunities for all children in the
community (Balduzzi, 2006). As a result, a pedagogy of dialogic relationships was created. This provided the foundation for the development of a dialogic pedagogy that underlines intersubjective relationships and promotes the agency of the children as central to the learning experience. Dialogic pedagogy stems from the collaborative efforts of early childhood institutions and communities in the region where democratic engagement led to the formation of a democratic civil society (Lazzari, 2012; Lazarri & Balduzzi, 2013). There is compelling evidence of critical theory’s strong presence in the Reggio Emilia’s ECEC theoretical and practical framework. To further elucidate this point Lazzari (2012) points out that Reggio Emilia has grown from a strong political and historical past. Subsequently, analysis of the Reggio Emilia educational project cannot be separated from social developments in the region and needs to be understood within its cultural and historical context. The powerful presence of social resilience movements and communal activism is further indication that the Reggio Emilia approach cannot be explained solely within the boundaries of socio-cultural constructivism or the postmodern paradigm. In addition to creating dialogic relationships, the social complexities to which the Reggio Emilia approach speaks to are political. Lazzari (2012) solidifies this point in her translation of Bruno Ciari’s (educational reformist in the region of Emilia Romagna) work (1972):

A school that brings together children from different social classes — as it is happening in Bologna — by promoting a constant exchange of experiences and cultural contributions, it is already an important democratic achievement. However creating the conditions for the ‘integration of different cultural backgrounds’ do not suffice [. . .]. The scuola dell’infanzia needs to become aware of its fundamental political task which is to create a common cultural ground for all children, regardless of their social conditions, [a
common cultural ground] that ensures a real promotion of each individual as a full person — active and creative — and as a critically thinking citizen’. (Lazzari, 2012, p. 558)

As such, Malaguzzi and his colleagues like Ciari (1975, 1993) advanced four guiding principles for democratic education in the region: (1) a competent child and an educator as co-learners and co-researchers; (2) a child as an active participant in the social life – a citizen in a community; (3) relationships build upon communication and dialoging; and (4) community, including all its members and resources, as an educational environment – environment as a third teacher. All four concepts closely resemble what critical scholars (Freire, 1970, 1987, 1993; Giroux, 1991, 2011; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999; McLaren, 2015) have pointed to in their work.

**Image of the child**

The critical paradigm argues that the image of the child should be the child as a citizen – a global citizen of today – which goes beyond the images of the child as learner, co-constructor of knowledge, co-researcher, or protagonist of his/her own learning. This image adheres to social movement and democratic education by utilizing pedagogical terms like democratic, activity-oriented, empowering, critical, and culturally responsive pedagogy along with the concept of heteroglossia (De Lissovoy, 2008; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1991; McLaren, 2003; Sheideman, 2007). The emergence of the image of the child as a critically active citizen has incredible implications for early childhood education. In Malaguzzi’s (1994) words, ‘when a child is born a citizen is born’. In short, the image of the child as seen through the lens of the critical paradigm is different from other paradigms because it utilizes pedagogical terminologies that lead to social activism. As Christensen and Aldridge (2013) put it: “Critical citizenship classrooms would emphasize feminist, cultural, or Reconstructionist discourses” (p. 62). In this
sense, the critical citizenship classroom assures a critically responsive environment that adheres to social constructs of childhood and views the children as rightful citizens of a society.

Democratic education. John Dewey was a pioneers among American philosophers whose views of the child as an individual with rights revolutionized early childhood curricula. Dewey’s recognition of the chasm between traditional educational structures and the realities of the modern world inspired many modifications in the field of curriculum design. Dewey understood the child as an active being rather than a passive one. The American educator saw the social contributions of the child to a community and society as a starting point to his/her involvements in the progress of political and democratic realms (Martin, 2000). Dewey profoundly believed in the human capacity to think and reason which led him to conclude that schools are microcosms reflective of the life of the larger society where democracy needs to be practiced (Dewey, 1997).

Empowering education. Education as empowerment is a central concept in the field of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogues and scholars have extensively referred to schools as social milieus that are required to adhere to the humanitarian and egalitarian values of society. In this sense, education fulfills its role as a mediator between traditional and modern social practices and becomes an advocate for a socially just future. From this perspective the child is viewed as an individual with the right to self-expression and self-determination and schools are expected to create an environment conducive to the emergence of social liberation, justice, and freedom (Freire, 1998; Portelli, 2001). It is in this context that schools resist academic neutrality and promote a curriculum of life. According to Portelli and Vibert (2002), “Grounded in the immediate daily worlds of students as well as in the later social and political contexts of their lives, curriculum of life breaks down the walls between the school and the world” (p.38).
Culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) “uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17). CRP is an inclusive pedagogy that relies on a dynamic interplay between school, culture, and community. Culturally responsive pedagogy seeks to transform students’/children’s knowledge about inequity and injustice through critical thinking and reflection. The collective endeavour to challenge academically neutral methods employed in ECEC encourages a shift in thinking paradigms. As a form of resistance to the colonization and marginalization of certain cultural groups, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy has the ability to empower social groups that have been disenfranchized or discriminated against.

Pedagogy of heteroglossia. Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of heteroglossia is revisited by Gutiérrez et al. (1995) who view it as a social experience, embodying the educators’ and children’s/students’ internal dialogization. To illuminate this point, Fairclough (1992) maintains that every text is a social text with intertextual and interdiscursive practices that occur in the classroom context but the text is in reality linked to the larger social context. Consequently, social heteroglossia enhances important concepts in critical education by explicitly promoting the use of multiple voices. These voices do not stay in opposition but rather in dialogic continuity. It is through these voices that educators can spark a collectivist pedagogy in relation to issues of race, gender, and class equality within local and global social orders (De Lissovoy, 2008). In the context of ECEC, heteroglossia takes place when young children are consulted and their feedback finds its way into decisions related to curriculum, policy, and practice. For instance, in Young Children as Active Citizens: Principles, Policies and Pedagogies, Mac Naughton, Hughes, and Smith (2008) present a number of case studies from early childhood research, pedagogy and policy-making in an effort to establish that perceiving young children as citizens
and active participants in decision-making is not merely a theoretical concept. In fact, the view of the child as citizen has had positive implications that has found its way into practice where young children’s suggestions and opinions are employed in curriculum design, policy making, and research findings.

Critique

While critical pedagogy plays an important role in maintaining democratic values in education, skeptics have criticized it for its presumed failure to evolve from Freire’s 20th century practices of historicism, dialectics, and orthodoxy (Apple, 2000; McArthur, 2010; Van Heertum, 2006). There are important issues that need to be effectively addressed and critiqued as far as critical pedagogy is concerned.

On philosophical grounds, it can be argued that the Marxist, post-Marxist, or neo-Marxist basis of the critical paradigm are no longer pertinent to the postmodern economic and social discourse in Western culture and society (Lather, 1991). In response to this point, McArthur (2010) claims that the Marxist roots of critical pedagogy can neither be overlooked nor disregarded; these roots should be taken into account when educators strive to embrace change through “structural forces of society” (p. 495). McArthur (210) further explains that CP (critical pedagogy) authors, for example McLaren (1988, 2015) and Brookfield (2001, 2003) view Marxism as a strong foundation for the paradigm. Popkewitz and Fendler (1999) echo this sentiment by adding:

Educational literature in the [Northern American continent] since the 1970s, for example, continually refers to different European literature for developing their conceptual and methodological directions to the study of the politics of curriculum. The translations of
European Marxists’ social philosophy, such as that of the Frankfurt School of critical theory from Germany, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, and more recently, French postmodern [Foucault], and feminist theories, are important to the production of a ‘critical’ space within education (p. 5).

The other critique refers to Freire’s hope for a better future that can be reframed as a utopian project of modernity. While critical pedagogy plays an important role in sustaining democratic values in education, traces of the patriarchal assumptions of the European intellectual tradition can be found in it. Leading feminist scholars have criticized critical pedagogy for the weak voices of women in the literature as well as for Freire’s ‘blind spots’ in dealing with issues pertaining to gender (Breuing, 2011; Ellsworth, 1989, hooks, 1990, Lather, 1998). For instance, Ellsworth (1989) argues that critical pedagogy should not be paired up with feminist pedagogy because the latter pronounces itself as an individually standing paradigm with its own “body of literature, knowledge, goals and assumptions” (p. 298). Christensen and Aldridge (2013) reaffirm this point by stating that, “the loudest voices of critical pedagogy are still white Western men” (p. 85). It is noteworthy, however, that the emancipatory nature of the feminist pedagogy has its roots in critical pedagogy that addresses issues related to sexism (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999).

Another problematic feature of critical pedagogy is its tendency to overlook discourses of students with various abilities and its failure to address rights of and practices with students with exceptionalities. Such issues are generally overlooked due to critical pedagogy’s proclivity to improve literacy skills through critical reflection and the Marxist-inspired concept that every individual should be critical of oppressive power structures and consequently active in the social realm (Gable, 2002). Gable’s (2002) criticism is fair as it coincides with Ellsworth’s (1989) point
that critical pedagogy continues to perpetuate a highly abstract and utopian approach to addressing diversity in classrooms and at times eternalizes the powers of dominance. In response to this Sewell (2013), while analysing the academic works of bell hooks, states:

> For critical pedagogy scholars, the term ‘critical’ is used to underscore the importance of the context of the assertion, and to protect and empower the individual thinker. However, the emphasis on context is not strictly for the individual’s protection. Unlike many critical thinking scholars, critical pedagogues hold that the context in which the assertion is made is important, as well as the consequences of adopting the assertion for both the individual thinker and the members of the social context in which the assertion, claim, or argument is made. (Sewell, 2013, p. 39).

While it has been argued that the critical paradigm (CP) is “long on criticism, but short on solutions” (Christensen & Aldridge, 2013, p. 85), a number of CP scholars like Darder (2002), bell hooks (1994), and Shor (1994) have changed their focus and have become advocates of more practically applied educational ideas like empowering education, engaged pedagogies, and pedagogy of care and hope (Van Heertum, 2006). Other scholars such as Bloch, Swadener, and Cannella (2014), De Lissovoy (2008), Giroux (2011), and Steinberg (2010), continue their CP journey and have revisited and rethought central CP concepts in educational practices in the presently compelling context of postmodernity. Acknowledging the existence of a myriad of critical pedagogies, McArthur (2010) states that CP scholars while revisiting the essential points of Freire’s theorizing regarding the oppressed and oppressor, recognize that freedom and change are radical for critical pedagogy and therefore “cannot be gained individually”; instead they should happen in solidarity where every individual contributes to “the welfare and betterment of all” (p. 497). Van Heertum (2006) denotes that CP which “started as a movement that
contributed strong critique with the commitment to hope” should not comply with the self-centrism so evident in postmodernism. Instead, critical pedagogy recognizes and appreciates both solidarity and diversity and galvanizes them to “move toward a discourse and action that capitalize on repressed desires and provide a provisional alternative vision” (p. 45-46).

**Conclusion**

In summary, there are four paradigms that are situated in relative proximity. These four paradigmatic clusters have developed their views on ECEC curricular design as well as proposed their views on the child. An in-depth analysis of the confluence and differences of these paradigms reveals that they are situated in continuum where the appropriation of pedagogical terminology from one paradigmatic cluster to another becomes an inevitable course of action.

Consequently, modernism continues to remain the most influential paradigm that has been triumphant in advocating an ‘instrumental rationality’ in the field of curriculum. The modernist paradigm produces scientific and pedagogical terms that adhere to high efficiency in the learner’s cognitive, physical, social, and emotional performances. Modernism encourages educators to act from the stance of academic neutrality and developmentally appropriate practices so as to sustain the economic goals of the status quo imbedded in human capital theory. To achieve its goals, modern education maintains the knowledge-power construct and equips educators with manuals on teaching and assessment instead of disrupting the status quo and creating spaces where envisioning alternative ways of learning and teaching is possible.

In the meantime, constructivism has become an inseparable part of the project of modernity. Even though constructivism has been seen as a middle-ground between the modern and postmodern paradigms, it has lost its powerful position when employed in practice.
Constructivism, as seen through the prism of developmental and socio-cultural theoretical approaches, is deemed as a conformist paradigm as opposed to a transformative one. In a way, constructivism has come to increasingly resemble modernism in that it too promotes academic neutrality and ‘mind/society binary relationships’ (Popkewitz, 1998). Constructivism draws on discussions related to social, cultural, and democratic issues and then transitions into a modernist mindset where concepts such as universal high-level academic outcomes and standardized assessments are central (Young, 2008). The inclusion of a modernist structure allows criticism of constructivism for instilling views of the child as a constructor of his/her learning as well as for portraying learner-centered educational environments as fundamental to democratic education. In this respect, constructivism has enabled postmodern scholars to assert that socio-cultural and socio-historical constructivism paved the way for postmodernism (Mac Naughton, 2003).

Although the postmodern discourse is far from a unified body, the literature that draws on it covers a wide range of issues including science, ethics, history, economy, and politics among other things and includes both modernist and postmodernist dimensions. Postmodern discourses in early childhood education that address issues of power, otherness, and rhizomatic ways of thinking, call on educators to explore and understand their self-ethics as well as to discover the self in the child. Although the concept of “self” is directly intertwined with the individuals’ self-determination, it is largely individualistic in nature. In this sense, postmodernism is not any different from modernism as it takes on new dimensions within the discourses of modern and constructivist conservatism. Postmodernism engages with pedagogical terms from the constructivist perspective, assigning new meaning to them in the process. Postmodernism in ECEC is rich in complexity and embodies a fluidity that allows it to draw from an array of
perspectives, empowering its followers to expand on traditional theorizing and focus on meaning-making constructions or interpretive pedagogy.

It is important to point out that all paradigms face criticism. However, among all the provided critique it is recognised that CP’s dynamicity, critical disposition, promotion of social activism, and ability to effectively address issues of power make it the most compelling paradigm consistent with the one originally proposed by Freire and Malaguzzi’s *image of the competent child* which explicitly addresses the significance of a child being a citizen and social actor. Nowadays, the critical paradigm is experiencing a reconceptualization where Freire’s ideas are under heavy scrutiny. With that, CP’s committed to the concept of praxis and political action has been unwavering. Critical pedagogy’s interest in social transformation unleashes an emancipatory potential in education (the ECEC discourse) that propels educators and learners to participate in social matters in order to both shape and transform social life. Furthermore, the critical paradigm has continuously attempted to subvert the foundations of power by questioning reality in relation to educational and social orders. The underlying constructs of the critical paradigm can help to reveal and demonstrate the complexities inherent in the field of early childhood education as well as elucidate the drawbacks of present-day policies when addressing essentialities and applications of early childhood pedagogies.

In conclusion, one of this article’s central arguments has been that *the image of the child*, which has become a key term in early childhood pedagogy as of late, has developed multi-faceted connotations that are heavily dependent on the paradigmatic, historical, cultural, economic and political contexts. An analysis of the *image of the child* reveals that the term has been misappropriated by various groups and used in different contexts where the original meaning of the *competent child* has been substituted with *the image of the child*.
with *developmentally appropriate competencies* and *school-oriented skills development*. This has led to promoting dominance, mainstreaming the field of early childhood, trivializing early childhood pedagogies and disempowering children. The early childhood literature pertaining to paradigmatic discourses demonstrates that the term originally proposed by L. Malaguzzi (1993/1994), a social constructivist scholar and political activist (Lazarri, 2012), was first appropriated by postmodern scholars. The postmodern paradigm, which offers diverse discourses in its own domain, has encouraged a multiplicity of meanings of the image of the child and led to the possibility for the other paradigms to revisit their attitudes regarding the term through the lens of hermeneutics. In other words, when modern and constructivist paradigms turned their attention to the *image of the competent child*, they readjusted their pedagogical terms to fit the concept. This, in turn, made the term *the image of the competent child* a cliché. The critical paradigm was pushed to the sidelines in ECEC as the early childhood discourses transitioned from modernist to postmodern thinking. This led to the regrettable omission of critical insights in discourses of the *image of the competent child*.

Even if one were to accept that clear boundaries do exist among paradigms, they constantly shift depending on context, author, and the timeline in which the views are expressed. The paradigmatic use of pedagogical terms in modern and constructivist paradigms as well as constructivist and postmodern paradigms, leads to the understanding that paradigms “create the intellectual, theoretical, and practical space for dialogue, consensus, and confluence to occur” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 167). It is paramount for the field of ECEC to step away from the self-individualism of modernity and postmodernity and to critically review the conceptual framework of developmental and social constructivism. ECEC needs to reach a consensus in its effort to recognize children’s potentials and to support and promote core democratic values that
are engrained in CP, to the field of early childhood pedagogy. The implementation of an early schoolification curriculum can be examined through coherent change, critical insight, and common understanding of what the CP paradigm has to offer.
ARTICLE 2 – Extending the Notions of Young Children’s Citizenship and Participation: What do Early Learning Frameworks have to Offer?

Abstract

This article provides a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Canadian Provincial Early Learning Framework (ELF) documents. ELFs are defined as documents that guide early childhood educators’ pedagogy and endorse best practices. Through a critical discourse analysis, ELF documents’ dispositions toward the concepts of young children’s citizenship and active participation are explored. Considering the strong connection between both concepts, they are viewed as central ideas in the critical-participatory paradigmatic discourse. In this context, the critical-participatory paradigm creates a theoretical framework for analysis and motivates the researcher to critically examine ELF texts to uncover the texts’ theoretical disposition. In line with the researcher’s commitment to critical pedagogy, contextualizing the charter of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) becomes central. The article also includes a discussion of historical constructs regarding the concepts of participation and young children’s citizenship. After outlining the theoretical foundation for the literature review, the axiomatic structure and paradigmatic inclinations of ELF documents are identified. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of pedagogical vocabularies utilized in ELF documents in an effort to understand how the texts encourage early childhood educators (ECEs).

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3 The critical-participatory paradigm adheres to the humanitarian and egalitarian values of society in which education is understood as a process of empowering students/children and subsequently views them as active participants who are capable of contributing to society. It is based on the concepts of transformative, democratic, and culturally responsive pedagogy where heteroglossia plays a central role. As Bakhtin (1981) proposed, the concept of heteroglossia is a “base condition for governing the operation of meaning” (p. 428). Heteroglossia is in opposition to unitary, universal language adaptations. It suggests that meaning conveyed through the symbolic linguistic ordinaries such as word, utterances, and text is dependent on “social, historical, meteorological, psychological” conditions (p. 428). Therefore, as Bakhtin (1981) concludes, each individual creates his/her own meaning of the universal text. This unique meaning, when communicated, reveals multiple understandings of a particular phenomenon, text, situation, etc. When multiple meanings are projected in a discourse, they enrich not only a discourse on a given phenomenon by acknowledging various interpretations but also individuals who participates in this discourse by encouraging them to revisit their worldview and life values.
to employ concepts of young children’s citizenship and participation in their pedagogical practices.

**Introduction**

In recent years, a momentum has been generated around exploring how young children’s ideas contribute to the development of early childhood curriculum, research, and policy (Christensen & James, 2008; Clark, Kjørholt, & Moss, 2005; Davies, 2014; Eke, Butcher, & Lee, 2009; Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008; Palaiologou, 2012). The emphasis on children as active citizens and contributors to the social discourse has challenged universal educational accounts of developmental constructivism as well as the cultural relativity of socio-cultural constructivism. The inclination toward greater engagement on the part of children in the educational landscape adheres to critical paradigmatic views of the child as well as participatory pedagogy which works to empower children and understand them as significant contributors to society. The concept of participatory pedagogy, as stated in the UNCRC (Woodhead, 2006, 2008), invokes a perception of the social in which children have rights, duties, and responsibilities (Giroux, 2011).

In the current article, the child is viewed as a competent individual who is a rightful citizen of society and possesses the right to contribute to social and educational issues that affect his/her everyday life. This outlook moves beyond a psychological or even educational view of the child and childhood and conceives the child as an individual who engages in social life with the civic right to express, communicate, and preserve his/her own position (Clark & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Eke et al., 2009; Mac Naughton et al., 2008; Palaiologou, 2012; Woodhead, 2006, 2008). The expansion of knowledge about the child in the 21st century from
scientific studies in fields such as experiential psychology, ethology, neuroscience, epigenetics, developmental and socio-cultural constructivism, have thus far failed to provide an all-encompassing view of the child as citizen. The scientific nature of these fields supports a generic, instrumentalist, and universal understanding of the child and childhood. Acknowledging the universal and contextual accounts of early childhood pedagogy, this article makes two central arguments. Firstly, in today’s global context, the pedagogical vocabularies of early childhood often show linguistic resemblance. Secondly, the philosophical and consequently paradigmatic discourses allow the pedagogical vocabularies to become cross-used depending on the local interpretations of pedagogical vocabularies. This is followed by a third argument in that early childhood pedagogical vocabularies while inheriting their similarities, often travel from region to region embodying their own contextual meanings through the symbolically inscriptive messages of the texts.

Hence, it is imperative for the field of early childhood education to examine global as well as local interpretations of the young child’s citizenry. The rationale here is that the UNCRC is global and utilizes universal vocabulary whereas ELF documents are local and as such offer their local interpretations of the global lexis. In lieu of these differences, this article maintains that the concept of young children’s citizenship and participation inherits historical/traditional assumptions that cannot be disregarded. Accordingly, the historical and social constructs of the young child’s citizenship are addressed and the connection between the concepts of children’s citizenry and participation is further explored through an examination of ELF documents.
Literature Review

Are Children Citizens?

Although young children’s citizenry is a contested concept in the literature, its roots can be traced back to cultural, social, and political discourses related to the past and present of the constructions of childhood (Coady, 2008; Moss 2014; Palaiologou, 2012; Woodhead, 2006, 2008). The historical evolution of children’s citizenship and participation highlights its relation to the human and political rights of young children as well as ethics in research and educational practices in the early childhood paradigms (Phillips, 2010).

In her discussion about young children’s citizenship, Coady (2008) examines the evolution of the human rights of the child as well as attitudes that each declaration of children’s rights helps shape in society. Coady (2008) presents a historical timeline where the 1924 first Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the 1959 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UNDRC), and the 1989 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) demonstrate different perceptions of young children’s rights as citizens. The documents represent different views regarding children’s right to actively participate in social construction. As Coady (2008) explains, “the 1924 Declaration is not directed at governments, but rather more generally at all adults who should recognize children’s needs” (p. 5). Next, the 1959 UNDRC speaks about the importance of recognizing the ‘best interest of the child’, particularly when governments address children’s rights of education and recreation. Accordingly, “The 1989 UNCRC (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1989) went beyond protective rights and included some civil and political rights for children, taking them a step further towards citizenship” (Coady, 2008, p. 7). Coady’s
(2008) analysis echoes the assertions of Kulnych (2001) regarding the necessity to recognize children as individuals who possess political identities and consequently cannot be separated from the concept of citizenship.


In an analysis of how the 1989 UNCRC is imbued in practice, Woodhead (2008) recommends that educators, researchers, and policy makers view young children’s citizenry in the context of participatory rights as they “resonate with well-established traditions of theory and research, most often expressed in terms of children’s activity and agency, and more broadly, their role in shaping their own childhoods” (p. 21). Woodhead (2008) stresses that while recognizing that the children’s rights to protection (food, health, and shelter) and provision (education and recreation) are essential, children’s participatory rights cannot be overlooked. A rapidly growing number of scholars (Coady, 2008; Cockburn, 1998; Harris & Manatakis, 2013; Hart, 1992, 1997; Lansdown, 2005; Palaiologou, 2012; Saballa, Mac Naughton, & Smith, 2008; Woodhead, 2008) recognize that discourses around the young child’s citizenry and right to
participate are imperative to building ethical relationships between children and adults where issues of equality in power and young children’s contribution to society are central.

**Young Children’s Participation: Unpacking the Concept**

Unpacking the concept of the young child’s participation and citizenry requires a thorough understanding of the concept of children’s participation and how it can be applied in practice (Harris & Manatakis, 2013; Palaiologou, 2012; Rhedding-Jones, Bae, & Winger, 2008). Hart (1992) suggests that the concept of children’s participation must be taken seriously and implemented effectively in educational settings. Hart (1992) defines participation as:

…the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship. (Hart (1992. p. 5)

Additionally, Hart (1992) creates a *Ladder of Participation* and declares that participation can be of two types – (1) participation described by manipulation and tokenism, and (2) genuine participation. One of the central features of participation as manipulation and tokenism involves adult social privileging over children. In this context, the children are expected to fulfill adult-proposed tasks and activities in adult-created and guided environments. Genuine participation, in contrast, is represented by shared control related to power or equality in power. It eliminates boundaries such as mature and immature and creates opportunities to build dialogic environments where important issues related to life and learning are negotiated and implemented collaboratively (Hart, 1992).
Shier (2001) offers a framework for children’s participation which addresses the child’s role in education and curriculum. Stressing the notion that children understand the value of education in their lives, Shier (2001) elaborates on how children’s genuine participation in curriculum decision-making processes can be attained. Specifically, in *Pathways to Participation Revised*, Shier (2006) identifies specific conditions for children’s participation in education from which both children and educators can benefit:

- High quality curricula and teaching development programs (service provision);
- Children and young people develop an increased sense of ownership and belonging (and consequently commitment);
- Students’ and teachers’ self-esteem increases;
- Students’ experience increases empathy and social responsibility; and
- The experience helps lay the foundation for citizenship and democratic participation, thus helping to safeguard and strengthen democracy. (p. 15)

Acknowledging the benefits inherent in children’s participation, Shier (2006) recognizes challenges that exist when it comes to the implementation of this framework:

- Convincing teachers that education should be a partnership between learners and educators;
- Allocating high priority to maintaining authority which entails control over their students;
- Recognizing that it is not the teaching that is important but the learning. (p. 16)

Taking into account these benefits and challenges, Shier (2006) proposes a diagram comprised of practical planning, implementation, and evaluation of the *pathways to participation*. The different levels of participation, according to Shier (2006), require
teachers/educators to demonstrate certain types of commitment including *openings*, *opportunities*, and *obligations*. *Openings* emerge when educators involve themselves in re-examining their beliefs about the social status of the young child and demonstrate intentions to think otherwise along with the commitment to embrace children’s ideas into practice. With that new *opportunities* occur. At this stage, educators need support with resources and professional development that can lead them to create innovative methods in pedagogy and new approaches in curriculum design. In the final stage, *obligations* turn into common daily practices where the institution and educators, along with the children, enable participation as a part of their school/childcare centre culture (Shier, 2006).

Hart (1992) and Shier’s (2001) views on children’s participation complement one another as they assert that participation can be fully achieved when adults and children are viewed as equal members of society who hold rights. In this space, adults and children exercise power relationships by negotiating and creating new learning imaginaries. When adults and children engage in the process of an open dialogue, they start to develop and share common meanings and set common goals in education. Hence, it can be stated that Hart (1992) and Shier’s (2001) ideas are in line with the critical paradigm’s views on dialogue, reflection, and praxis because they adhere to the concept of action, dialogue, and change. The connections become more vibrant if dialogue transcends beyond mere educational technique and becomes a social act that welcomes multiple voices, heteroglossia⁴. These voices are reflections of the children’s life narratives. When educators think critically about children’s narratives, the stories reveal issues related to social, gender, economic, and power inequalities. Educators who practice heteroglossia engage

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⁴ Social heteroglossia enhances important concepts in critical education by explicitly promoting the use of multiple voices. These voices do not stay in opposition but rather in dialogic continuity. It is through these voices that educators can spark a collectivist pedagogy in relation to issues of race, gender, and class equality within local and global social orders (De Lissovoy, 2008).
in critical reflection by listening to and welcoming narratives “in which differences can be affirmed and transformed in their articulation with historical and relational categories central to emancipatory forms of public life: democracy, citizenship, and public spheres” (Giroux, 1992, p. 75). In this respect, praxis becomes a leading activity that guides pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 1992; Giroux, 1997, 2011; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999, 2010; McLaren, 2015). In ECEC, as in any other educational setting, an application of praxis occurs when educators actively listen to children’s ideas and create an environment that engenders heteroglossia. Such an environment empowers children to contribute their stories as part of a collective dialogue “in which different languages compete and collaborate to create an environment that variously promotes or impedes teaching and learning” (De Lissovoy, 2008, p. 113). In other words, in a dialogic, heteroglossial space, educators become aware of the social aspects of the child’s life while critically reflecting on their own understandings of social constructs amongst those of their children (De Lissovoy, 2008). Here, the relationships between heteroglossia and the Gramsci and Freirean proposed “philosophy of praxis”5 are recognized. The concepts inform each other and pave a path toward social and educational change. Social changes that occur in educational settings are changes that inevitability affect larger society. They are bound by the key notions of solidarity, openness, and contribution that happen through dialogization. According to Dewey (1916), democratic principles of dialogization practiced in educational spaces help sustain and promote democratic societies. Therefore, it is believed that envisioning and understanding the child as a narrator who contributes to dialogue is paramount to creating democratic ECEC pedagogies.

5 As De Lissovoy (2008) explains, “In the dialectics of liberation described by both Gramsci (1971) and Freire (1997), popular understandings are not simply reinterpreted but rather negotiated in a collective process of reflection and dialogue that leads toward transformational analysis that cannot be specified beforehand by teacher or leader” (p.61).
In ECEC, the notion of a child as a contributor has been addressed in the works of scholars including Clark and Moss (2005); Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot, and Weyenberg (2006); Eke, Butcher, and Lee (2011), Kessler (2014); Lazzari (2012), Saballa, Mac Naughton, and Smith (2008), Soto and Swadener (2005); Urban (2015), Vaughan and Estola (2008), Woodhead (2006, 2008), and many others. These scholars have elaborated on the importance of recognizing young children’s citizenry and participation when discussing the role of the educator and the young child in establishing the public provision of early childhood programs and democratic principles in education. Furthermore, Palaiologou (2012) discusses the extent to which young children are involved in the research process in that the research is conducted not on but with children. Palaiologou (2012) is among an increasing number of scholars who question the present stance of sociological and educational research ethics which continues to perceive the child exclusively as a human to be explored. The issue that arises here is whether children have a legal right to either accept or reject their participation in a study. Eke, Butcher, and Lee (2011) take a step further and explore how effectively young children can or should inform policy. One of the central points highlighted by Eke, Butcher, and Lee (2011) is that learning and developmental outcomes as presented in policy documents mainly reflect “our [adult] imaginings of childhood” (p. 36). An inevitable outcome of this mentality is that the child must be institutionalized and governed so as to grow up to be an experienced, skillful, efficient citizen.

Opposing the UNCRC views on the rights of children, there were other views advanced by scholars like Farson (1974) and Arneil (2002), who believed that children’s rights could only be attained if the child was allowed to be self-determining. In particular, Farson (1974) reasoned that since the right to vote was central to being a citizen, the child should have a legitimate right to vote as a citizen. Therefore the young child as a political being, Farson argues, is utopian.
rather than realistic. Arneil (2002) brought up a different argument which was developed around children’s capabilities to formulate their thoughts in a rational and reasonable manner. Arneil (2002) argues that young children’s right to participate and contribute is heavily dependent on the children’s age. In response to these critiques, advocates of the young child’s citizenship and right to participation would argue that it is essential to not solely focus on the discussions regarding what rights children should or should not have. In fact, the concepts aim to address the issue of how effectively adults, educators, researchers, and policy makers employ children’s rights to participate in everyday life activities, curriculum, research, and policy (Bennett, 2008; Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Cody, 2008; Eke et al., 2011; Eurochild’s reference group, 2011; Harris & Manatakis, 2013; Woodhead, 2008). A broader view on the rights of children takes on issues pertaining to social justice and equality while also leading to more complex discourses on democracy and education.

**Democratic Principles in ECEC**

In an effort to strengthen public understanding of the human rights of all young children, General Comment No. 7 of the UNCRC refers to the implementation of the child’s rights in early childhood (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005). Specifically, the Comment was created to “draw States parties’ attention to their obligations towards young children” and “to contribute to the realization of rights for all young children through formulation and promotion of comprehensive policies, laws, programmes, practices, professional training and research specifically focused on rights in early childhood” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, p. 1-2).
Freeman (2010) declares that educators’ understandings and implementations of young children’s human rights ensure that children have access to civil, political, and economic rights and their humanity and dignity are recognized and respected. Mac Naughton, Smith, and Lawrence (2003) concur with Freeman’s vision by acknowledging that:

The principles underpinning democratic societies require that everyone – regardless of age – should be able to participate in civic life and so listening to young children is a prerequisite of a vigorous democratic society. By listening to children, adults can assist them to enact their right as citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives, giving them a stake in those decisions. Listening to young children helps them to build the skills and knowledge they need to be active citizens and gives them experience in participating in decision-making. (Mac Naughton, Smith, & Lawrence, 2003. p.12)

Consequently, listening to children and consulting with them are central to high-quality ECEC program delivery. The experience also empowers children to be active participants who dynamically engage with democratic relationships and structures in society.

The link between education and democracy has been a longstanding issue of interest for educators and researchers. The idea of universal access to education for all children regardless of their socio-economic status can be traced as far back as the 17th century to Ian Amos Comenius (1631), the “father of didactics” and an advocate of pedagogical thinking. Since Comenius’ time there have been numerous discussions around what application of democracy in public education means.

For the purpose of this study democracy is understood as a “moral and political ideal”; and “as a moral and political ideal, democracy substantively deals with how we as human beings
ought to relate with each other” Portelli (2012, p. 1). In this sense, so-called relational democracy adheres to the principles of “participatory, public and critical democracy” (Portelli, 2001, p. 280). Slattery (2006) moves beyond Portelli’s (2001; 2012) point and denotes that democracy is “an ideal which is filled with possibilities, but also an ideal that is part of the ongoing struggle for equity, freedom, and human dignity” (Slattery, 2006, p. 228). With that in mind, different authors focused on different aspects of democracy and its application in practice. For instance, Dewey (1916) viewed democracy as human beings’ active involvement in matters that relate to their life, while Malaguzzi (1995) claimed that democracy is a public, community action that aims to deploy change for the common good of a society. Meanwhile, Freire (1997) asserts that democracy asks individuals to become critical thinkers so they can uncover existing social inequalities where some individuals are seen as more privileged than others.

Specifically, according to Dewey, “democracy means freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness – the emancipation of mind as an individual organ to do its own work” (Dewey, 1903, p. 193). Dewey’s interpretation of democracy is not limited to the level of intelligence (IQ) it is understood as a process of creative “pro-democratic” thinking which, in turn, leads to social action (Dewey, 1916). Social action or participatory democracy can be illustrated as liberation of mind where mind seeks to attain equity and self-determination.

Building on Dewey’s ideals, Loris Malaguzzi (1920–1994), the founding father of the Reggio Emilia educational project, anticipated the emergent, project-oriented approach to educating young children as a way to help children experience democratic relationships while nurturing authentic relationships with community members and developing a sense of belonging with and in the community. Authentic and equal relationships along with ongoing communications among children, families, and communities are central to the successful
implementation of democratic principles in early childhood education (Lazzari, 2012; Lazzari & Balduzzi, 2013; Mantovani, 2007). With that in mind, Malaguzzi motivated educators “to build a new society together as a reaction” to the socially dominant ideologies so to give “a new meaning to human and civil existence” (Lazzari & Balduzzi, 2013, p. 152).

In this vein, the Brazilian critical pedagogue, Paulo Freire (1997, 1998), spoke about the importance for an individual to become a self-reflective critical thinker who is capable of seeing and understanding unequal propositions of the present-day conservative and neoliberal ideologies (Giroux, 2011). Freire believed in the power of critical pedagogy that connects the theory of educating children and students with social change. Critical pedagogy empowers children and students to act as creative, intelligent human beings who participate in and contribute to the social prosperity of a community and society at large (Hare & Portelli, 2013). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1997), Freire addressed the weaknesses of the educational system by criticizing schoolification of children, the promotion of “banking knowledge”, and the marginalization of children’s abilities to actively participate in matters of concern to them. In *Pedagogy of the Heart* (2007), Freire talks about “becoming a citizen of the world” through the lens of locality, contextuality, and belonging. The Brazilian educator noted, “No one becomes local from a universal location. The existential road is the reverse” (Freire, 2007, p. 39).

To summarize, active, social participation, as well as critical and communal engagement are recognized as fundamental blocks of a coherent and caring pedagogy. With that, Portelli and McMahon (2004) identified three major kinds of children/student engagement in relation to democratic principles in education, namely conservative, liberal, and critical-democratic. Portelli and McMahon argue that the critical-democratic form of engagement is the most suitable
concept for creating an environment that advances democracy in education and “entails the enactment of a curriculum of life” (Portelli & McMahon, 2004, p. 40).

In ECEC a growing number of renowned scholars (Bloch, 2006, 2014; Cannella, 1997, 2014; Clark, 2010; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2003, 2005; Moss 2013) have extensively advocated for the inclusion of democratic principles in early childhood education. For instance, Clark and Moss (2005) speak about the child’s role in curriculum decision making and offer the *Mosaic Approach* as a practical example of their theoretical assumptions. Mac Naughton, Lawrence, and Smith (2003) conducted a study entitled *Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age: Hearing Young Children’s Voices*, in an effort to demonstrate how children’s views and ideas can inform policy. These are among a myriad of examples that demonstrate the need for young children to be perceived as young citizens who contribute to and participate in a communal social life.

Considering these points, comprehension of a critical-democratic engagement that adheres to interactive, emancipatory pedagogy employs creativity and flexibility. It should not be diminished to a number of replicable, technocratic, and universal educational strategies. On the contrary, pedagogy ought to be viewed and implemented in accordance with the particular context in which conditions are created for children to freely express their opinions and actively participate in social matters that affect their life. As such, it is understood that democratic education promotes and supports young children’s engagement and it is in line with the concept of the young child’s social participation, contribution, and citizenship. Thus, democratic education entails the productive and active participation of children as social agents as opposed to mere participants in various activities.
In this respect, the current paper asserts that if early childhood educators critically understand the concept of young children’s participation while viewing these young learners as citizens and contributors to society, they consequently become engaged in democratic practices and implement them in child care settings, all the while interpreting and questioning ELF curriculum documents.

Significance: Why Scrutinize ELF Texts?

According to Urban (2015), in the past two decades, the field of ECEC has undergone significant changes reflective of progress in the philosophical, social, economic, and political understandings of the childhood phenomenon. On the one hand, Urban (2015) states, “These two decades of EU [European Union] engagement with [ECEC] services for young children have seen a remarkable transformation of the underlying concept and understanding of what these services are, who they are for, and what purpose they serve” (p. 294). On the other hand, Urban (2015) points out that macro-politics and socio-economic motives that guide these ECEC transformations in the late 1990s and early 2000s have changed and have been rebranded, “reducing early childhood services to their function as pre-school institutions, and focused almost exclusively on ensuring school-readiness and preventing early school leaving” (Urban, 2015, p. 295). These observations in the EU context can also be relevant to changes that occurred in Canada in roughly the same time period. In recent years, cross-cultural studies that have garnered support in the European context (Papathodorou, 2012; Papathodorou & Moyles, 2012) have succeeded in gaining a small foothold in the Canadian educational landscape. Following the EU idea of conducting cross-cultural studies, this paper represents an analysis of how Canadian provinces have embraced the concepts of young children’s citizenry and participation, while using the texts of ELF documents as a tool of communication. This is particularly important at a
time when discourses on individualism, schoolification, and privatization seem to be in competition with discourses on democratic and just early childhood education. In the words of Moss, Dahlberg, Ollson, and Vandenbroek (2016):

In healthy and vibrant democracies, ‘contesting early childhood’, meaning confrontation and debates between ‘a multitude of perspectives’, should be an everyday and everywhere occurrence, whether in services themselves, in their surrounding communities, in the academy, or among policy-makers and politicians. (Moss et al., 2016, p. 2)

Acknowledging the fact that Canadian provinces vary in their contextual locality, this analysis recognizes the value of the provinces’ local and historical heritage and takes into consideration the fact that ELF texts were developed within each unique provincial context where demographic and socio-economic influences cannot be undermined (Howe & Prochner, 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Prochner, 2013). Yet, there are many common threads that bind Canadian provinces as activists and educators strive to embark on “a shared vision anchored in an evidence-based framework for federal, provincial and territorial governments to use in the building of equitable early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all” (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, 2016, para. 1). In this situation, it becomes paramount for educators to deconstruct ELF texts, because the educator has a right to express his/her choice and “the duty of not being neutral” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 180).

Methodology: CDA as a Type of Discourse Analytical Research

The current study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological framework, which provides the necessary tools for analyzing educational texts. Critical
Discourse Analysis was originally used in critical research on language by Volosinov (1930/1973), the Frankfurt School, Habermas (1996/1998), Foucault (1969/1972), Pêcheux (1982), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1992), Chouliaraki (2008), and later on by scholars whose work focused on ‘critical linguistics’ (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1992, 1995; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1996). In contemporary social sciences, Discourse Analysis is expected to move beyond,

the reductive linguistic analysis of early analytical philosophy, whereby ‘true’ meaning was discovered through the formal study of sentences, is replaced by heuristic analysis of how meaning is produced in context- in ‘reflexive’ linguistic analysis, where the analyst […] not only understands the rules of each language game but is also able to move between games and through the various and incompatible logics of linguistic activity. (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 4).

Gee (2011) expands on Chouliaraki’s ideas and asserts that discourse analysis can be applied to any text, either written or oral, and it “is based on the details of speech (and gaze and gesture and action) that are arguably deemed relevant in the context where the speech was used and that are relevant to the arguments the analysis is attempting to make” (p. xi).

Therefore, in the past two decades, CDA has emerged as a distinct and effective tool for analysis not only in linguistics but in the social sciences and humanities including education.

As applied in this study, the text is understood as an “operative semiological (linguistic) mechanism” that affects a group’s thinking (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007, p. 19). A group’s thinking represents a complex, multi-dimensional thinking that encompasses the government’s vision on ECEC, ELF authors’ knowledge of and experiences in ECEC and educators’
interpretations of the texts. Here, it is recognized that ELF texts should not be viewed as a reflective practice exclusively of the author(s) but rather understood in the complexity of the situation and/or context in which the texts have been produced and circulated (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007).

Firstly, all ELF texts have been written by either one author or a group of authors. This fact denotes that none of the written texts should be viewed as neutral considering that they convey the author(s)’s disposition towards the subject matter (ECEC) through the means of linguistic and grammatical features (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2007; Foucault, 1977; Gee, 2011; Woodak, 1996). The text messages used in ELF documents convey explicit messages that illuminate themselves through the use of educational vocabulary (later referred as lexicon). ELF texts use the tacit messages that shape each document’s overall paradigmatic partiality and irradiate it through the use of descriptive wording, grammar, and metaphor (Gee, 2011). Both explicit and tacit text messages are equally powerful. They form the ECEC unique professional culture as well as shape educators’ views about young children and their role in society.

Secondly, ELF texts are situated in the context described by each province’s cultural, historical, economic, and political background. The government responsible, known as the Ministry, has approved and disseminated the documents to educators. As such, ELF texts intrinsically become “a part of and influenced by social structure[s]” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 352) where educators as readers undertake two roles: On the one hand, educators are the immediate interpreters of the text messages and on the other hand, they are consumers who are influenced by the text. As Gee (2011) notes:

A Discourse with a capital ‘‘D’’ […] is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, distinctive ways of writing/reading. These distinctive
ways of speaking/listening and/or reading/writing are *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, and believing. (Gee, 2011, p. 177)

Therefore, to better understand the information consumption as it relates to the concepts of young children’s citizenship and participation through a medium like text, the current study utilizes the Fairclough (1992) proposed levels of CDA. Mainly, an analysis was conducted at three levels to offer a three-dimensional framework for interpreting ELF texts:

**Level 1: Discourse-as-text** places an emphasis on linguistic features such as patterns in vocabulary (e.g. lexicon, descriptive wording, and use of metaphor). Specifically, the current study utilizes the NVivo software to explore the use of pedagogical terms in ELF texts. Identifying pedagogical terms along with an exploration of how frequently these terms are used in ELF texts helped determine the ELF’s theoretical framework disposition and/or the ELFs’ paradigmatic tendencies. Here, the analysis was guided by Moss’ (2007, 2008) position that penchant toward a particular paradigmatic predilection often reveals itself when educational scholars, researchers, and policy-makers utilize a ‘distinct [educational] vocabulary’. In other words, this analysis demonstrated that when ELF texts utilize pedagogical terms, they develop lexicons that demonstrates their paradigmatic partiality. Due to the fact that the discourse-as-text analysis was not sufficient in drawing concrete conclusions on a particular topic, the researcher proceeded to the next level of discourse analysis: discourse-as-discursive practice.

**Level 2: Discourse-as-discursive practice** focuses on how texts are linked to the context in which they are distributed. To achieve this goal, the researcher offered a historical sketch of where and when ELF documents were developed as well as provided an analysis of common and distinct features of the texts by addressing the documents’ axiomatic structure as well as through cross-referencing. This step in analysis was helpful in developing an understanding of why some
ELF texts have more similarities than others. The second step brought more clarity to the analysis by creating a grand paradigmatic narrative where pedagogical terms transcended beyond the boundaries of a given ELF text and created the leading Canadian theoretical dispositions. After identifying the leading theoretical approaches and/or grand paradigmatic narratives, the researcher moved to the final level of discourse analysis and scrutinized how the concepts of young children’s citizenship and participation are represented in ELF texts and within identified paradigmatic clusters.

**Level 3: Discourse-as-a-social practice** has evolved from Gramsci’s conceptualization of the ideological and hegemonic powers to “postmodern theories of discourse, those of Derrida and Foucault in particular” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 121). Specifically, for Gramsci and other neo-Marxists “language and power are organized around economic and political structures of domination and, therefore, …[when] focusing precisely on language as an instrument for constructing the ‘common-sense’ of culture, economic and [political] interests [become] a driving force of social dynamics” (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 9). Here, the researcher identified UNCRC as a dominant discourse regarding children’s rights. In this vein, the researcher scrutinized how the dominant UNCRC discourse is contextualised in ELF texts. Therein, guided by Derrida’s notion “that all forms of knowledge arise out of the meaning relations – relations of opposition and combination – inherent in language structure” (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 14), the researcher investigated how the concepts of young children’s citizenship and participation are represented in ELF texts. In this part of the analysis, the researcher first examined how the ELF documents utilize the UNCRC text; and, secondly, critically explored how the ELF texts address and explain the role of the young child as a citizen, participator, and contributor to educational matters and policy construction.
Thus, the CDA methodology was used to scrutinize the linguistic mechanisms and properties of ELF texts as well as to raise awareness of the complexities in text/power/knowledge relationships. Accordingly, the CDA method of text analysis “offer[ed] a different mode or perspective of theorizing, analysis, and application” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 352).

**Findings and Discussion**

**Discourse-as text: Paradigmatic Lexicon and Empirical Evidence**

As part of the analysis process, NVivo 'word frequency queries' was run to identify what terms are recurrently used in ELF texts. The rationale behind conducting the word frequency came from a previously conducted literature review study. In brief, the study suggested that educational paradigms utilize pedagogical vocabularies to express their views on and understandings of pedagogical practices. Specifically, the word frequency queries was used as a starting point in analyzing ELF theoretical frameworks’ paradigmatic dispositions. This is in line with Kneller’s (1984) assertion that, “Since we think with the aid of words, we use them to label our concepts” (p. 4). As part of the study, the researcher used word queries to explore evidence on whether or not the use of pedagogical terms in ELF documents can explicitly demonstrate paradigmatic predilections. To achieve this goal, the researcher created a lexicon for each paradigmatic cluster. The lexicons consist of pedagogical vocabularies that appear frequently within the paradigmatic discourse and are considered as descriptive attributes and

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6This study provided a brief overview of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) literature and addresses existing early childhood paradigms. Specifically, it focuses on the classic paradigms surrounding the concept of the image of the competent child. The article categorized early childhood educational paradigms into four broad clusters: modern, constructivist, postmodern, and critical. The article addressed the relative continuity among the paradigms in their utilization of pedagogical terminologies such as competent child, child as a learner, and child as scholar in need of being educated. In addition, it explores how these pedagogical terminologies take on different meanings once unpacked and inserted into a particular context. The article argues that the multidimensional and interrelational use of the pedagogical term the image of the competent child, currently utilized both in ECEC theory and practice, cannot be confined to a particular paradigm. The article concluded that the critical paradigm advocates for participatory pedagogy and interrogates issues related to the early institutionalization of young children, along with an instrumentalist application of early childhood pedagogy. The critical paradigm embraces and promotes the image of the competent child through the lens of democratic practices in education that adhere to the creation of a more just society.
signifiers of each paradigmatic cluster. In other words, to analyze the concepts of modernity and developmental constructivism, the researcher searched for pedagogical terms such as “readiness”, “schoolreadiness”, “continuum”, “skills”, “evolvement”, “educators’ role to support and guidance”, “activities” (educational), “educational intervention”, “goals”, “meet/accommodate children’s needs”, “prepare”, “produce”, and “mature” (Appendix B). The researcher determined that these terms have been strongly associated with the modern and developmental constructivist perspectives that view the child as a person in the process of ‘becoming’. The child tends to demonstrate a progressive development of his/her skills and abilities under the governance of these educational paradigms. Here, progressive development is strongly associated with stages of development. There is a direct connection between each developmental stage and the child’s chronological age as well as indicators that signify the child’s “normal” development in physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive domains (Thomas, 2005). Even though it is inevitable to encounter variations in children’s progression, the stages are “invariant”. In other words, invariant or universal progression in the development of the young child assumes that each child, regardless of his/her cultural belonging or socio-economic status, is expected to go through a sequence of stages. Based on this reasoning, schoolreadines is viewed as a final academic goal for the child to achieve.

To compensate for the shortcomings of ethological (modern) and developmental constructivist perspectives, ELF documents offer other terms to highlight the social orientations in constructivism. Pedagogical terms such as “belonging”, “identities”, “relationships”, “inclusion”, and “social responsibility” were used along with other educational terms such as “scaffolding”, “exploration”, “expression”, “learning stories”, and “pedagogical documentation” in an effort to embrace the socio-cultural constructivist agenda (Appendix C).
In addition to the aforementioned terminologies, other terms that were widely used in ELF documents include “meaning-making”, “giving and listening to young children’s voices”, “multiple identities”, “multiple modalities of learning”, “multiple modalities of literacies”, and “literate identities” (Appendix D). This lexicon adheres to postmodern pluralism. Here, the postmodern paradigm functions as a mediator between modern and constructivist discourses. It reconceptualises the mainstream image of the child as a learner by proposing to recognize the various abilities and identities of the child.

The word frequency analysis revealed that, although some ELF texts direct the discussion on ECEC pedagogy using the postmodern paradigmatic vocabulary, the use of pedagogical terms that adhere to the critical paradigm is either minimal or nonexistent. For instance, pedagogical terms related to critical pedagogy, specifically with reference to children’s activity, such as “children’s rights”, “equality”, “children’s participation”, “children’s contribution”, “dialoguing with children”, and “social justice” were either presented superficially or not presented at all (Appendix E).

As indicated, the word frequency analysis aided the researcher in understanding what paradigms are present or omitted from ELF discourses on children’ learning and pedagogy. Although the word frequency analysis provided some evidence as to the use of pedagogical vocabularies, it did not suffice in explaining conceptual truths about ELFs’ paradigmatic dispositions. Keeping in mind that conceptual truth is different from “empirical” quantifiable

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7 “Soto and Swadener’s (2005) work [as well as the works of other critical pedagogues] represent the critical new paradigm in childhood studies and childhood education. The use of critical in this context signals the critical in critical theory and its concern with power structures and their influence in everyday life. In the case of contemporary children sociopolitical and economic structures shaped by corporate power buoyed by the logic of capital as well as patriarchal structures with their oppressive positioning of women and children are central concerns of the critical paradigm” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. xiii).
evidence, the researcher explored the utilization of the paradigmatic lexicon within the context of each ELF document.

From Empirical Evidence to Conceptual Truth: Paradigms Revisited

From modernism to developmental constructivism

The variation in frequency regarding the use of different terms arises when each ELF document is explored individually. A brief statistical analysis provided by NVivo demonstrates that the highest number of references to the term “development” along with its derivatives “develop”, “developing”, and “developers” can be found in the Alberta document (223 times), followed by Quebec (143 times), PEI (139 times), Ontario HDLH (134 times), Ontario ELECT (131 times), Manitoba’s early learning frameworks (100 times), Saskatchewan (85 times), Manitoba’s SESS (71 time), New Brunswick (62 times), and British Columbia (58 times). After a close examination of the word frequency, the researcher explored the use of the term in context. The researcher determined that the different provincial frameworks use the term “develop(ment)” for various purposes: (1) to acknowledge early learning and child care institutions that have contributed to the development of the documents and are committed to it; (2) to recognize that children’s play experiences supported by responsive educators who create authentic relationships and a stimulating learning environment are essential for the healthy development of the child; and (3) to demonstrate that early development and early learning interrelate as supported by a multitude of scientific research. The third category is of particular interest to the researcher as it identifies a visible connection between theory and practice and as such helps determine the documents’ paradigmatic discourse(s). To identify this connection, the
researcher explored theoretical references in the documents and analyzed the use of the term “develop(ment)” in the texts.

In general, it was determined that frameworks that have the highest number of references to the word “develop(ment)” utilize the works of developmental constructivist theorists. In addition, references are made to various fields including neuroscience, epigenetics, mental health, maturation theory, along with developmental psychology. For instance, in the section glossary of key terms, Alberta’s curriculum framework outlines:

A developmental perspective of learning describes the naturally developing child undergoing the process of individual growth and change as she and he progress through predictable age-appropriate developmental stages. As they develop, children acquire the following skills: social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, speech/language, and physical including fine and gross motor. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, n.p.)

The document Meeting Early Childhood Needs: Québec’s Educational Program for Childcare Services contains a section entitled “Development of the Whole Child”, which states:

Child development is a comprehensive process that calls on several dimensions. However, each dimension comes into play to varying degrees, according to what the child is learning and the activities in which he or she is engaging. (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007, p. 23)

This section states that even though children’s development in emotional, physical and motor, social and moral, cognitive, and language dimensions is sequential and “relatively foreseeable”, it is also dynamic and “not linear”. Considering that all dimensions “are closely interrelated”, educators need to recognize their importance and stimulate all areas of the child’s
development by utilizing a cycle of educational intervention (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007).

In a section entitled Theoretical Foundations, the document *PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences* indicates its proclivity toward children’s development and learning by offering an in-depth description of the constructivist approach and by referencing constructivist scholars the like of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Montessori, and Malaguzzi. The section mainly emphasizes the social aspects of the child’s development, acknowledging that play experiences as well as established authentic relationships play an important role in children’s well-being, development, and education (Flanagan, 2011).

Meanwhile, Manitoba’s early learning curriculum framework and guide for play-based early learning advances that educators’ knowledge of children’s brain development, self-regulation, as well as understanding of children’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development is critical for planning responsive curriculum play-based activities and creating inclusive environments (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2009, 2015).

Both of the Ontario documents analyzed in this article place great emphasis on scientific evidence regarding young children’s development. The documents make it clear that the neurobiological, psychological, and developmental studies on childhood play a predominant role in shaping the early childhood curricula, in addition to providing a rationale and guidance for early childhood pedagogy (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2014). Specifically, the ELECT document states, “early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health. (…) Understanding of children’s development begins with an understanding of the sequence of how development proceeds” and “skills are likely to emerge in a predictable continuum” (Ministry of
Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007, p. 5-6). The ELECT document recommends that educators incorporate the Continuum of Development into their daily practices in their effort to observe and document children’s activities and interactions, plan the curriculum, and communicate the child’s development and learning progress to families and caregivers (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). The follow-up document How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years removes the Continuum of Development section and replaces it with “Understanding Child Development”. This document states:

ELECT provides a resource, the continuum of development, that educators can use to understand the sequences of development. It is not a lock-step, universal pattern that should be achieved according to a specific timetable, nor is it intended to be used as an assessment tool or checklist of tasks to be completed. (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 17)

The section “Understanding Children from Different Perspectives” in the How does Learning Happen? document explores factors such as “the family, social and cultural contexts in which [children] live and play, their own unique perspectives, and their life experiences” which are as significant as ‘traditional’ domains of the child’s development (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 17-18). In this vein, Ontario has demonstrated a clear conceptual shift that occurred within the constructivist paradigm. The document How does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years which replaced the ELECT document offers an alternative to the purely scientific, developmental view of the child. It demonstrates a shift to the social constructivist perspective and emphasizes on the importance of concepts such as “exploration”, “engagement”, “well-being”, and “belonging”.

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From developmental to social constructivism

While the conceptual shift is evident in Ontario’s development of the ECEC thought, the provinces of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and New Brunswick did not apply any revisions to their documents in lieu of their original position regarding the social constructivist conceptualization of the child and early childhood pedagogy.

For example, Saskatchewan’s early learning guide elucidates the importance of children’s holistic education, learning, and development in a section entitled “How Young Children Learn”. In this part, the document points out the importance of brain development through play, describes levels of social play, as well as the effects of dramatic play on the cognitive development of the child. Additionally, the document sates:

A general pattern of childhood development exists. However, the rate of development varies from child to child and is influenced by the home and community in which the child grows up and the goals and expectations set for them. This guide assumes that early childhood educators have an understanding of the developmental changes that typically occur in children during the preschool years. It is beyond the scope of the document to outline in detail, the development of three-, four- and five-year-old children. (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 28)

The guide identifies areas for holistic development that include social-emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, language, and literacy. Saskatchewan’s early learning guide’s emphasis on spiritual development also carries important implication:

Spiritual growth involves more than meets the eye, more than material objects and more than the obvious. It creates wonder that initiates a response.

• Children are naturally curious about their world
• Appreciate the natural world and observe beauty in what they see, hear and do in their surroundings. (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 29)

The province of British Columbia identifies early childhood development in its broadest sense as “the growth that takes place from birth until age six” (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007, p. 37). In the introduction section, the document states:

Early learning refers to the emerging and expanding of young children’s physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and creative capacities. All children are born with a curiosity about themselves, other people, and the world around them, and in this sense are born learners. As they grow, they develop both their capacity and dispositions to learn through supportive relationships with their families, with other children and adults in their communities, and with their environments. Early learning is the foundation for lifelong learning, and the basis for individual, social, economic, and environmental well-being. (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007, p. 2)

While British Columbia’s ELF lays great emphasis on the child’s social being, it underscores that cultural heritage is paramount to the formation of young children’s complex identities. Specifically, the document values indigenous cultural heritage and argues, “Today, as many Aboriginal communities revitalize their languages, cultures and traditions, the development of children’s cultural identity is considered a top priority in early learning” (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007, p. 8).
The New Brunswick early learning curriculum framework explains its’ position by outlining the vision for ECEC programs:

Our vision is that all children will grow to their fullest potential with dignity, a sense of self-worth, and a zest for living and learning. [...] In keeping with contemporary research and theory, the framework emphasizes the image of the child, relationships, and rich, stimulating environments. It views children as confident, active learners whose learning, growth, and development are profoundly influenced by the quality of their relationships with people and their interactions with places and things. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p 1-2)

From social constructivism to postmodernism

Topics that adhere to social and cultural identity formation are addressed not only in the works of social constructivists but also in the works of postfoundational and/or postmodern scholars (Mac Naughton, 2003). Postmodern views have been introduced to the field of early childhood education through the works of Dahlberg and Moss (2005, 2014), Mac Naughton (2003; 2005), Sellers (2013), Pacini-Ketchabaw (2011, 2015), and Cannella (1997, 2014) among others. Traces of postmodern thinking are present in some ELF texts but not all. A more detailed coding of the EFL texts demonstrates that the use of terms such as “meaning-making”, “giving and listening to young children’s voices”, “multiple identities”, “multiple modalities of learning”, “multiple modalities of literacies”, and “literate identities” are in line with efforts to embed postfoundational ideas in the heavily constructivist agenda of the texts. Accordingly, the authors underline the importance of multi-environments in which multiple voices come together, creating discursive practices in which children are viewed as independent, competent, “mighty” individuals (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014).
In the section “Goals for Early Learning and Care”, the New Brunswick early learning curriculum framework addresses “Communication and Literacies” and formulates its understanding of “Communicative Practices”, “Multimodal Meaning Making”, and “Literate Identities with/in Communities”. In the “Multimodal Meaning Making” subsection, the document posits:

Children use symbols of various sign systems as they construct meaning through multiple modes of image, print, gaze, gesture, movement, and speech. Language, art, mathematics, music, and drama are unique sign systems that each have primary symbols: language uses the alphabet, art uses line, colour, shape, and pattern, mathematics uses numbers, music uses notational marks, and drama emphasizes gesture, posture and speech. Learning requires that children have opportunities to integrate a range of symbol systems from language, art, mathematics, music, and drama. Using talk, alphabet and numeric print, dance, gesture, action, music, image, sculpture, graphing, map-making and construction block-building they make meaning and communicate. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 32)

In a different section entitled “Literate Identities with/in Communities”, the New Brunswick document explains:

Using literacies, children figure out ways of holding on to, exploring, and transforming their experiences and identities. Children are systematic observers, imitators, listeners, speakers, readers, authors, illustrators, inventors, actors, performers, dancers, builders, music and art makers. Learning requires that educators listen for and learn the range of experiences children bring with them to ensure that children have opportunities to use their knowledge as they access multiple texts from a range of sources. While creating and
consuming texts with children educators raise questions exploring multiple interpretations, assumptions, and biases. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 33)

The section entitled “Values for Early Learning Processes” in the Alberta early learning framework points out:

We value play. It is one of many multimodal literacies and an essential medium through which children explore and participate with others and in the world. Children’s active, collaborative, complex, communicative, vivacious playfulness within commonplace and imaginary events and experiences is a meaning making process. In early childhood communities, this means that we provide children with many opportunities to co-construct their knowledge. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 27)

The Alberta document also offers an overview of the child from the post-foundational perspective:

A post-foundational perspective views these children as actively exploring relationships of power and identity and children’s play experiences as opportunities for educators to learn about children and how they relate with others. Educators would listen to, observe, and reflect on their own interactions to identify unintended messages related to equity and fairness. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 43)

Accordingly, the study took a step forward to determine how the other Canadian ELF documents that do not utilize the language of “multi” modalities of learning and observation explain the concepts of multi-representations and multi-abilities of young children. The analysis revealed that the majority of ELF documents, excluding British Columbia’s ELF, use terms such as “documentation” or “documenting children’s learning” extensively. Documentation,
according to these provincial documents’ descriptions, is a multimodal process of data/evidence collection that demonstrates children’s learning. Documentation is also used as a tool for communication between educators and families (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2009, 2015; Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008; Flanagan, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2014).

Within these discourses, the British Columbia document entitled *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice* stands apart from other ELF documents because it creates its own term of “pedagogical narration”. Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, and Sanchez (2015) assert:

> Pedagogical narration, simply put, is a way to make children’s learning visible as educators make decisions about curriculum development. It can take the form of:

- anecdotal observations of children
- children’s works
- photographs that illustrate a process in children’s learning
- audio and video recordings of children engagement in learning
- children voiced ideas […]

At the same time, pedagogical narration is more than this – much more. We see it as a productive space for complexifying early childhood curriculum. We see it as a tool, both to complexify our curriculum and make the complexity of our curriculum visible. In our collaborative work with early childhood educators, we use pedagogical narration for reflection, deconstruction, planning, experimentation, and action within a discourse of
meaning-making. Further, we use it as a doing – as a process rather than an activity that can be accomplished once and for all. (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 114)

In view of this description, the document *British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice* encourages educators to discover and document ordinary moments. The document explains, “An ordinary moment is a common occurrence or habitual instance that is observed, recorded and/or analyzed” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n/d, p. 12). Here, the idea of “pedagogical narration” is in line with the postfoundational notion of “rhizomatic curriculum/pedagogy” (Mac Naughton, 2005; Sellers, 2013).

In keeping with the notion of rhizomatic pedagogy, British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Alberta’s ELF documents conceptualize observation as an individual’s (educator’s) subjective viewing. Specifically, the British Columbia ELF document states, “Observation is a subjective activity; you should strive to refrain from placing set boundaries on your observations” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n/d, p. 12). This notion is, with no doubt, in contrast to the developmental constructivist perspective that views observation as an objective act in which educators are expected to be objective by overcoming their own biases (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

**Developing Critical Insights**

Generally speaking, the critical insights pertaining to the pedagogical frameworks are in need of major improvements. For example, Ontario’s ELECT document points out that culturally responsive dialoguing with families is important and it should be “based on mutual trust and

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8 A rhizomatic curriculum espouses an intra-active pedagogy that is “inclusive of children’s and students’ thinking and different strategies and ways of doing, as well as their subject positionings on the margins of social class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality” (Taguchi, 2010, p. 9).
respect… sensitive to family culture, values, language and composition” (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007, p. 9). The document does not thoroughly explain its position toward the critical paradigm, it merely deals with the concepts of diversity and dialogue that should take place between families and educators by making references to Freire’s work.

The Early Learning Frameworks from the provinces of New Brunswick and Alberta demonstrate an effort to explore the concepts of “democracy”, “citizenship”, and “children’s voices” in relation to the critical participatory discourse in pedagogy. At the core of these frameworks’ understanding of “critical” and “participatory” pedagogy there is still a strong “dosage” of postmodern theories that are not consistent with critical pedagogues’ views regarding the application of democratic principles in education. On the whole, it can be claimed that the critical and participatory paradigms are underrepresented⁹.

**Grand Paradigmatic Discourses**

As previously stated, the current study utilized Guba and Lincoln’s (2000) classification of paradigms to explore the linguistic features of ELF texts including the use of vocabulary, descriptive wording, and metaphor (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2011). In carrying out this analysis, the researcher took into account Moss’s (2007, 2008) position which states that every paradigm becomes explicit through the use of a “distinct vocabulary” referred to as lexicon. It is understood that the lexicon or set of linguistic units can fulfill two roles; one being the general usage of the terms and the other being the context-based applications for specific purposes of conceptualization. Hence, this section briefly touches on the general use of terms while also focusing on their context-based utilization.

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⁹ The consequences of such underrepresentation will be discussed in detail in the follow-up sections of this analysis.
In summary, the analysis in this section imparted evidence that ELF’s theoretical framework dispositions can be primarily grouped under three paradigmatic clusters. As supported by the literature, the dispositions can be segmented into the following paradigmatic clusters:

(1) The modernist paradigm described by the ethological perspective which explains childhood as a stage in life (Thomas, 2005).

(2) The constructivist paradigm that encompasses both the developmental and social constructivist perspectives. The developmental perspective is represented mainly within the boundaries of the ‘traditional’ progression of children’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive abilities where the progressive mastering of skills happen through exploration, play, and relationship building (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The social constructivist perspective lays emphasis on historical heritage and cultural context and locates the child within the social systems of family, child care institutions, and community (Mac Naughton, 2003).

(3) The postmodern paradigm announces pedagogy as a multilayered, provoking, and transforming process and the child as a rightful competent learner (Sellers, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2015).

With this in mind, the analysis demonstrates that ELF texts do not subvert their theoretical framework under one paradigm. Instead, under the guidance of the Ministry what the authors sought to do is create an interconnectedness among paradigms, representing an amalgamation of theoretical views. This is while the main trend in ELF’s paradigmatic disposition, generally described as constructivist\textsuperscript{10}, demonstrates a combination of both

\textsuperscript{10} Constructivism is understood as a doctrine that thrives in an intermediary space between modern and postmodern paradigms. Constructivism has a penchant for traditional [modernist] views specifically those related to social orders. In retrospect, it also embodies a more critical view of human beings as active constructors of new orders as opposed to passive recipients of knowledge. In light of these considerations, constructivism has been closely associated with modernism particularly because it emerged “within a period of intense modernization that involved the
developmental and social constructivist approaches. In this respect, the developmental approach adheres to the concepts of objectivism, sequence, order, and scientific truth/evidence as guiding principles in pedagogy (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Matusov, 2011; Popkewitz, 1998; Slattery, 2006; Young, 2008), while social constructivism abides by the relativism of locally and specifically constructed contexts in which hermeneutics/interpretations, as well as symbolic representations of a reflective reality take on a predominant role (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003; Slattery, 2006). Therefore, the findings from this analysis do not come as a surprise considering the assertions made by Dahlber, Moss, and Pence (1997, 2007):

> Even if we have started on a journey to deconstruct the field of early childhood pedagogy and its social practices, and tried to be open for tensions in these practices by being skeptical to natural categories, essentialist oppositions and representational claims, we are fully aware that we are all inscribed in modernist discourses. (p. 28)

In conclusion, when ELF documents utilize an amalgamation of pedagogical terms represented by the three paradigmatic clusters, they reveal their flexibility to and validation of a variety of views that co-exist in the ECEC field of study. But at the same time, they “ignore the immediate, first hand effects [of these views] on children, parents, [educators] and administrators” (Bogotch, Schoorman, & Reyes-Guerra, 2016, p. 2). The challenges are most likely to occur when educators attempt to employ Ministry approved documents in practice. For instance, if educators are considered as consumers of the texts and are consequently introduced to a variety of pedagogical terms as signifies of a certain paradigmatic discourse, they may not be theoretically equipped with the knowledge about existing paradigmatic discourses. In such

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industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization that we now associate with modernity and the modern Western welfare state” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 537).
circumstances, educators are encouraged to create their own interpretations of the text, which may or may not be accurate. As a result, educators are either likely to struggle interpreting ELF texts or may refuse to engage in in-depth interpretations and instead employ superficial understandings of pedagogy. On this point, if to believe that “theory is itself practice, there is the question of ideological knowledges within the reflexive self-representation of theory, which is […] linked to the question of how the particular theoretical practice is networked with other practices” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 27). Hence, understanding the critical theory/paradigm as a mediator between theory and practice, would mean that social practice is regulated by ‘knowledge interests’ (Habermas, 1972). In the case of the current research, ‘knowledge interests’ are driven by the related ministries and, therefore, produce paradigmatic as well as practical dominant discourses within Canada. As a consequence, ELF texts depict both paradigmatic (theoretical) and pedagogical (practical) variations across the country that lead to both the theoretical and practical discrepancies while also interpreting the role of the child and childhood. In part, this happens because ministerial documents like ELFs create either highly theoretical discourses or impose academic oriented pedagogies that do not equip educators with skills to think critically about young children’s role in society. Despite addressing issues pertaining to culture, gender, race and ethnicity, these dominant discourses are superficial and compliant to the main political and economic trends of conservatism, liberalism, and more recently, neoliberalism. In this vein, on many occasions early childhood education is understood as a structured systematic intervention which takes place in response to the current political agenda (Kessler, 2014). In this educational context, the concept of young children’s participation is diminished to mere participation reduced to the children’s belonging to the same-age. Hart (1992) describes this type of participation as a non-participatory act and refers to it as
“manipulation”, “decoration”, and “tokenism”. Tokenism happens when children appear to be given a voice and a choice, but in fact the choices are minimal or do not exist (Hart, 1992).

While taking these findings into consideration, the researcher explored how geographical and historical proclivities and structuring of the documents led to the creation of grand paradigmatic discourses that, in turn, influenced educators’ conceptualization of young children’s citizenship and participation.

**Discourse as discursive practice: History and Structure**

**Early Learning Frameworks: A Historical Sketch**

Since the 1997 publication of the *Jouer, c'est magique!* (Playtime is magical!), Québec’s Early Learning Framework (Tougas, 2002), many Canadian provinces followed suit and developed ELFs. In 2007, Québec revised the 1997 framework and published *Meeting Early Childhood Needs: Québec’s Educational Program for Childcare Services* (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2013).

In Ontario, the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, under the request of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) developed *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT) in 2007 (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2015). In 2009, Charles Pascal, the Special Advisor on Early Learning to the Premier of Ontario, published a report entitled, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. The report laid the foundation for the development of a number of early childhood initiatives in the province of Ontario (e.g., full-day kindergarten). The report was, however, published before the childcare sector was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education which in turn led to the creation of the Early Learning Division (Ministry
of Education, Child Care, 2016). In 2013, under the patronage of the Ministry of Education, the Early Learning Policy Framework document was developed. One year later and followed by countless revisions of Ontario’s early childhood provision, the document entitled How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years (HDLH) was released. This was followed by the Child Care and Early Learning Act that came into effect on August 31, 2015 (Ministry of Education, Child Care, 2016).

In British Columbia, the Ministry of Education collaborated with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to create the Early Learning Framework in 2007. A similar document entitled, Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice was also published in an effort to create a network of professional support for early childhood educators (British Columbia, Education & Training, Early Learning, Teach, 2016).

Under the mandate of the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, Caroline Krentz, Professor Emerita at the University of Regina, produced the Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide in 2008. This was followed by Learning for Change and Creating Early Learning Environments in 2009 and the Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers Learning Guide in 2010 (Government of Saskatchewan, Education, Early Years, 2012).

The Department of Social Development in New Brunswick and a research group led by Pam Whitty and Pam Nason from the Early Childhood Centre at the University of New Brunswick created the Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care in 2008 (Langford, 2012). This was followed by a report by the Government of New Brunswick’s annual professional development plan called Valuing Early Learning and Child Care in Action:


In 2011, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Prince Edward Island released the PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences. The document was created by the national expert on early childhood education, Kathleen Flanagan. Flanagan and the Early Learning Framework Advisory Committee developed the PEI ELF (Prince Edward Island, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2016).

In 2014, the province of Alberta produced Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta. The document was created by Lee Makovichuk, Jane Hewes, Patricia Lirette, and Nancy Thomas, faculty members at MacEwan University, in collaboration with other educational professionals, government policy representatives, and academics (Childcareframework, About us, 2016).
Generally, an Early Learning Framework is a document that guides early childhood educators’ practices in ECEC. While ELFs are considered policy documents in some Canadian provinces, there are provinces that do not consider them as policy documents. For instance, in June 2015, the Ontario Ministry of Education released the *Minister’s Policy Statement on Programming and Pedagogy made under the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* requiring operators of licensed childcare centers and licensed home childcare agencies to follow the provincial ELF *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years* (2014). The move was aimed at guiding licensed child care programs under subsection 55 (3), *the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014* (Ministry of Education, Child Care, 2016). The inconsistencies that ensued regarding whether ELF is a policy were due to the “development of frameworks [that have] not been clearly coordinated with other major policy changes to a province’s delivery of early childhood education and care (ECEC)” (Langford, 2012, p. 207).

In 2006, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released *Starting Strong II*, which stated, “Evidence is not available about the pedagogical approaches in ECEC programmes although some provincial statements refer to desired pedagogical orientations. With the exception of Quebec, specific curricula are not required for child care programmes” (p. 302). Even though a specific ECEC curriculum is still not required, all early childhood institutions including home care centers and nurseries are asked to follow pedagogical guidelines as outlined in the provincial ELFs.

In essence, ELF documents offer a set of values, principles, and guidelines on how to educate children based on research findings in early childhood development and education. Bertrand (2008) acknowledges that early childhood programs are social institutions that are reflective of their community and the province’s culture, therefore “[their] purposes may be
varied, depending on [their] view of childhood, what [they] think families want and need, and the
historical, social, cultural, and economic context” (p. 4). Essentially, ELF documents analyzed in
this article are understood as unique documents, rooted in provincial contexts and traditions, in
order to better accommodate children and their families.

It is apparent that despite fundamental differences in the approaches adopted in the
creation of ELF texts, they can all be categorized as structural documents as part of a joint effort
on the part of academia, policy makers, and community members. The provincial Ministries
published and released the documents to a wider educational audience making them available in
both English and French, with the electronic versions easily accessible on the provincial
Ministries’ websites. In addition to ELF documents, the Ministries also provide a number of
additional resources to support and explain the documents’ content.

As the ELF documents from the provinces of Québec, Ontario, British Columbia, New
Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and Alberta were being developed,
revised, and published, their paradigmatic analysis revealed the changes in Canadian theoretical
and pedagogical scope of practice.

Québec’s updated early learning program, Ontario’s ELECT, British Columbia’s ELF,
New Brunswick’s curriculum framework, Saskatchewan’s early learning guide, and Manitoba’s
curriculum framework were published between 2007-2009, while the provinces of Prince
Edward Island and Alberta released their ELF documents in 2011 and 2014 respectively. It is
important to point out that in 2014/2015, Ontario and Manitoba revised their ELF documents
advancing the central principles of the previously published documents. For instance, Ontario’s
ELF How Does Learning Happen states:
ELECT is recognized as a foundational document in the early years sector. It provides a shared language and common understanding of children’s learning and development for early years professionals as they work together in various childhood settings. The principles of ELECT have informed provincial child care policy, such as the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, as well as pan-Canadian early learning initiatives such as the Statement on Play of the Council of Ministries of Education, Canada. ELECT principles are also embedded in the program document used in Ontario’s innovative Kindergarten program. (…) Over the past years, ELECT has had a significant impact. Many child care operators, child and family programs, municipalities, postsecondary institutions, and other organizations have integrated elements of ELECT into their programs, training, and quality improvement strategies. (Ministry of Education, Child Care and Yearly Years Resources, 2014, p. 9)

Manitoba’s Starting Early, Starting Strong: A Guide for Play-Based Early Learning in Manitoba Birth to Six document maintains:

A Guide for Play-Based Early Learning in Manitoba – Birth to Six is based on Early Returns: Manitoba’s Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools. The Birth to Six guide has been organized around the preceding guiding principles for high-quality early learning programs in Manitoba. Each principle is discussed in detail, and includes reflective questions for early years educators. (Healthy Child Manitoba, Early Childhood Development, 2016, p. 3)

The frameworks that were published at a later time, such as the PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences (2011), Alberta’s Play, Participation, and Possibilities: An Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Alberta (2014), and
Manitoba’s *Starting Early, Starting Strong: A Guide for Play-Based Early Learning in Manitoba Birth to Six* (2015), demonstrate cross-provincial referencing to previously created ELF documents. For instance, the *PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences* (2011) provides references to Ontario’s ELECT document using it as an example to demonstrate that national and provincial frameworks are built on scientific research findings. Another reference to ELECT in the PEI document is related to the discussion on young children’s self-regulation. The other ELF text referenced in the PEI document is the BC-based Early Learning Framework’s description of children as curious learners and the importance of fostering strong relationships between the children and educators (Prince Edward Island, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2016). Another case in point can be found in Alberta’s ELF document:

> In Section three the framework goals and dispositions to learn are described in more detail, focusing on their use in practice. Holistic Play-Based Goals for Children’s Responsive Care, Play, Learning, and Development—wellbeing, play and playfulness, communication and literacies, and diversity and social responsibility—are reprinted from the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 15)

The Alberta ELF document also states, “As developers of the Alberta curriculum framework, we discovered through the development and advisory process that New Brunswick’s carefully researched goals, grounded in a socio-cultural perspective of early learning, resonate with what we want for children in Alberta” (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 84).
for the Early Years document. Specific references can be found in parts where the importance of becoming reflective or critically reflective practitioners are discussed, as well as when creating stimulating environments for children is addressed (Healthy Child Manitoba, Early Childhood Development, 2016). The analysis of these documents offer insights into the dominant discourse(s) in early childhood pedagogy and the image of the child as a citizen and active participant.

Axiomatic Structure

All ELF texts are structured documents that follow Bennett’s (2005) recommendations on early childhood education pedagogy. In particular, Bennett (2005) suggests that traditional views of curriculum should be avoided and instead proposes a “pedagogical framework” that suits the nature of ECEC and “calls attention to three broad sets of quality”, including orientation quality, structural quality, and interaction procedural quality. To attain these set of qualities, Bennett (2005) posits that either the curriculum or the pedagogical framework needs to incorporate the following elements:

- A statement of the principles and values that should guide early childhood centres;

- A summary of programme standards, that is, how programmes should be supported to facilitate development and learning, e.g. reasonable child/staff ratios, high educator qualifications;

- A short outline of content and outputs, that is, of the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values that children at different ages can be expected to learn and master across broad developmental areas;
• *Pedagogical guidelines* outlining the processes through which children achieve the outcomes proposed (through experiential learning; open, play-based programming; involvement...), and how educators should support them (through adult interaction and involvement; centre and group management; enriched learning environments; theme or project methodology...). (Bennett, 2005, p. 6)

In line with Bennett’s (2005) assertions, all ELF documents provide vision/purpose/core concepts and/or guiding principles. The documents elucidate the different provinces’ understanding of children’s development and learning while also identifying areas for early development (Quebec, Ontario’s ELECT), learning (Ontario’s HDLH; British Columbia; PEI; New Brunswick; Saskatchewan; Manitoba SEST; Alberta), or both development and learning.

In what follows, sections found in ELF documents that convey provincial views on the foundation for children’s learning and development have been listed:

- Developmental Continuum and Planned Curriculum (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2015);
- Development of the Whole Child and Educational Interventions (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2008);
- Areas for Early Learning (Ministry of Education, BC, 2008);
- Goals for Early Learning and Care (Government of New Brunswick, Education and Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood, 2008);
- How Young Children Learn (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, SK, 2008);
- Learning Principles and Learning Goals (Flanagan, Prince Edward Island, Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, 2011);
The Foundation of Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2008);

Foundations for Learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, HDLH, 2014);

Curriculum Meaning Making: Goals and Dispositions (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014)

With some variation in the titles, all ELF documents proclaim that young children’s learning and development happens through the act of play, considered as either a spontaneous or intentionally planned activity. Through play, children’s skills and abilities progress in different areas including: well-being, belonging, expression, engagement, communication, literacy or literacies, social and personal responsibility, diversity and inclusion, and building relationships with adults. Accordingly, provincial ELF documents emphasize the importance of creating authentic relationships among children, educators, and families while also stressing that a responsive environment, be it social or physical, is paramount to the child’s healthy development and experience of learning.

Moreover, all ELF documents describe and explain the role of the educator. The role of an educator is either represented in an exclusive section or woven into the content of the document through other sections. An educator is, hence, expected to become either a reflective or critically reflective practitioner. Reflections are presented in the form of proposed questions that early childhood educators are required to consider when they implement the documents in their day-to-day practice. Using the question format instead of statement proposals is an attempt to leave the document structure open because as Elliot (2010) points out, “Frameworks and curricula cannot mandate attitudes, assumptions, and reflection; unable engage dialogically [educators] cannot know or respond to individual and local concerns” (p. 5). In this respect, ELF documents
essentially differ from compulsory school curricula. However, some similarities still exist, particularly when ELFs incorporate terminologies like goals or expectations, assessments or evaluations (Bennett, 2013).

Compared to compulsory school curricula, ELFs’ goals and assessments tend to be more on the descriptive side as opposed to prescriptive and are expected to cover a significantly broader range. The utilization of such terminology varies from document to document and at times carries different meanings. For instance, an NVivo text search demonstrates that Ontario’s HDLH document (2014), Alberta’s curriculum framework (2014), PEI’s learning framework (2011), and New Brunswick’s curriculum framework (2008) use the language of goals and expectations more frequently than ELF documents from British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Quebec. A thorough analysis of how these terms are utilized in the text reveals that although some provinces prioritize the use of these terms more than others, they are usually accompanied with descriptive words such as “holistic” and “goals and aspirations”. For instance, Ontario’s HDLH document states:

The goals are not intended to be used as a checklist of tasks to be completed or benchmarks to be achieved. They are intended to be used by educators in planning and creating environments, experiences, and contexts for children’s learning and development across all domains. (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 13)

Meanwhile, Saskatchewan’s early learning program guide (2008) explains:

A general pattern of childhood development exists. However, the rate of development varies from child to child and is influenced by the home and community in which the child grows up and the goals and expectations set for them. (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 28)
Another NVivo text analysis was run to explore ELF documents’ utilization of the words *assessment* and *evaluation* as a measurable instrument for goals and outcomes. The results indicate that the provinces of New Brunswick (13 times) and Alberta (11 times) are more in favour of using these terms compared to PEI (7 times), Saskatchewan (7 times), Ontario HDLH (4 times), Ontario ELECT (3 times), and Manitoba’s *Early Returns* (2 times) and *Starting Early, Starting Strong* (1 time). There was no evidence that British Columbia used these terms in its ELF document. This finding prompted further analysis and the results demonstrate that at times, ELFs utilized terms such as assessment and evaluation synonymously. For instance, New Brunswick’s ELF states, “The primary purpose of record keeping, assessment, and evaluation is to celebrate relationships and enhance children’s well-being and learning” (Government of New Brunswick, Education and Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood, 2008, p. 44). On a number of occasions, the terms assessment and evaluation were replaced with documentation, learning stories, and observation records. While addressing early years pedagogy, Ontario’s HDLH (2014) stresses, “using pedagogical documentation as a means to value, discuss, and make learning visible” (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 16). This is while PEI’s ELF affirms that documentation and assessment should include “Learning Stories and other assessment practices” (Flanagan, 2011, p. 12) whereas in the section *Observation and Reflection – Critical Skills* in Saskatchewan’s ELF, it is indicated that gathering information about children requires various forms of documentation including photographs, posters, videotape recordings, checklists, anecdotal records, and portfolios (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008). This is while the British Columbia ELF document does not use either of these terms and instead provides an additional resource for educators entitled, *Understanding the British Columbia Early Learning Framework: From Theory to Practice* (2008). The additional resource focuses on
pedagogical narration as a practice and provides a step-by-step guide for educators on how to employ pedagogical narrations in practice.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that each ELF document contains a glossary of key terms. Here, it is believed that definitions of key terms as explained in the documents, along with the incorporation of the terms in the text/context, uphold the document’s paradigmatic disposition\textsuperscript{11} known as ELF’s theoretical framework.

Discourse as a social practice: Are Children Given a Voice to Participate and Contribute?

The Child with Rights: Reference to and Utilization of the UNCRC

Subsequent to obtaining a holistic understanding of the ELF text’s paradigmatic preferences, historical proclivities, and axiomatic structuring of the document, the researcher moved to the core of the study by exploring how the dominant ideology of UNCRC is utilized and contextualized in the documents. This was in line with efforts to interpret the main concept of children’s citizenship and participation following Hart’s (1992) “Ladder of Participation”. Here, it is worth restating that the literature suggests that strong connections exist between practical applications of the UNCRC, and viewing young children as socially active participants and citizens (Woodhead, 2008).

At this point, the researcher examined whether or not ELF texts refer to the UNCRC and if so in what capacity. An initial analysis demonstrates that the HDLH document from the province of Ontario, as well as ELFs from British Columbia, New Brunswick, Alberta, and

\textsuperscript{11} The concept of paradigm has been generally defined as a worldview informed by a constellation of concepts, ideals, and beliefs that guide our actions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; 2000). Guba and Lincoln (1994; 2000) argue that positivist, constructivist, critical theory, postpositivist, and participatory paradigms inform the field of educational research and are capable of responding to ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions.
Saskatchewan, reference the UNCRC. In particular, British Columbia’s Early Learning Framework states:

The Convention recognizes children as citizens with the right to reach their fullest potential, to be treated with dignity and respect, to be protected from harm, to exercise a voice, to engage in play and recreational activities, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. This framework can help adults ensure these rights are upheld. (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007, p. 7)

The New Brunswick early learning curriculum document frequently references the UNCRC. In a section entitled, “In the Best Interests of the Child”, the document states:

Determining what is in children’s best interests requires ongoing conversation, communication, and negotiation. Diverse families and communities differ in what they believe to be best for their children, and the children themselves are entitled to a voice. As well, the interests of individual children always exist in fragile balance with the interests of the various groups to which they belong. Consequently, children’s best interests must be understood in the context of their dynamic relationships with families, communities, and cultures. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 6)

Moreover, in the section “Values”, the New Brunswick curriculum adopts a similar framework to that of the British Columbia ELF when it declares the following statement:

We value the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, ratified by Canada in 1991, which recognizes children as citizens, with rights for opportunities to reach their fullest potential, the right to be treated with dignity
and respect, to be protected from harm, to exercise a voice, to engage in play and recreational activities, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 9)

Saskatchewan’s early learning guide also refers to the UNCRC while acknowledging children’s right to play. It posits:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989) declares that children have a right to play and their education should aim for holistic growth and development. (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 4)

Meanwhile, the Ontario document, How Does Learning Happen? states:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) highlight how all children, including those with special needs, are entitled to the same opportunities – for example to health care, nutrition, education, social inclusion, and protection. When children with special needs have access to appropriate support from early years programs it can help them to have rich and fulfilling childhoods and prepare them for meaningful participation in society. (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 25)

Additionally, Alberta’s curriculum framework explains:

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that every child has the right to protection, participation, and provision for survival and development without discrimination. Regardless of social, cultural, and economic background and differing capabilities, our strength-based perspective
recognizes the potential within each child. While resisting categories that marginalize children by culture, ability, gender, or socioeconomic status, we recognize that circumstances arise when specialized supports are necessary to ensure that children experience success in programs of family choice and thrive within their early childhood communities. Such assistance may involve physical, cognitive, or emotional supports and services, as well as additional supports for families. These supports are intended to reveal each child’s potential and create equitable early childhood communities. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 17)

The analysis further demonstrated that not all of the provincial ELF documents provide a reference to the UNCRC. The provincial ELF documents that do refer to the UNCRC document utilize it for a variety of different purposes. For instance, Saskatchewan’s early learning guide cites the UNCRC in order to elaborate on children’s right to play (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008). This is while the Ontario early years pedagogy document as well as the Alberta curriculum framework use the UNCRC to emphasize the importance of inclusive practices where children with exceptionalities have the right for and access to “specialized support” services available to them (Ministry of Education, 2014; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014). The British Columbia ELF document and the New Brunswick curriculum framework stand out when they introduce the concept of young children’s citizenship, acknowledging that children have a voice that cannot be overlooked or disregarded (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007; Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007). To this end, as Hart (1992) confirms, the concept of young children’s citizenship can only be understood and explained when children are perceived as active
participants in and contributors to educational and social matters. Hart alludes to this as “child-initiated shared with adults” participation and places it at the very top of the “Participation Ladder” (Hart, 1992, p. 8). The following section will explore how explicitly Hart’s views on participation are utilized in ELF documents.

**Participation and Contribution: Foundations for Critical-Democratic Education**

Using the NVivo general text search query, the researcher discovered that the term “participation” was utilized 592 times across ELF documents. Alberta’s early learning and child care curriculum framework uses the term “participation” more often than any other province. A close examination through the process of coding demonstrates that Alberta’s status could be in part due to the use of the term in the title, the acknowledgement section, as well as in reference to family, educators, and community involvement. In addition, the word “participation” was used to describe children’s engagement in learning through play. As stated by the Alberta framework:

> Learning becomes dynamic as educators and children come together to explore, communicate, examine, question, problem-solve, and challenge what is known and what is yet to be understood. Educators value children’s ways of knowing about the world through their senses and whole body exploration. Within this dynamic care, play, and learning environment, ideas bring people together, and active engagement and participation is what helps those ideas deepen and grow more meaningful. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 28)

This citation describes children’s “active engagement and participation” as a guided act within the boundaries of learning experiences, specifically in relation to play experiences. This fact does not make Alberta’s curriculum framework any different from those of other Canadian provinces analyzed in this study. A detailed examination of the codes created in NVivo
demonstrates that the Alberta ELF document views the child as a member of a group in child-
care settings, who is encouraged to partake in curriculum activities, mainly play activities.
Specifically, it was discovered that children’s participation is acknowledged and valued when
children take part in self-directed play where they are in control of their actions and can create
knowledge, express their understandings, emotions, and ability to communicate (Ministry of
Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; Famille Québec,
Services de garde, 2007; Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family
Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007; Early Childhood Research and
Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007; Early Years
Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2009; Flanagan, 2011;
Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014).

Further exploration reveals an understanding of the child’s participation in the process of
developing a sense of belonging where the child develops relationships with others. It is through
the development of such educational interactions that “meaningful participation” occurs (Ontario
Ministry of Education, 2014). Another important aspect of participation in a group setting is for
the child to become literate, develop communication skills while being involved in “groups’
story time” (Flanagan, 2011) or form “literate identities” (Early Childhood Research and
Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007).

A deeper analysis of the prevalence of the term participation reveals that safe, organized,
and natural physical environments stimulate and encourage children’s participation. This can be
credited to the fact that consistent, responsive, and inclusive environments motivate children to
construct “positive self-identities” (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early
Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas,
Furthermore, an assortment of natural materials and toys help children to develop respect for diversity and provide opportunities for language acquisition for English language learners (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). It is assumed that the individual child’s needs are met within these environments through socialization and individualized programing (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007). Here, it is understood that an assortment of materials in creating “age-appropriate” learning environments that stimulate participation is primarily the adult’s responsibility. According to Hart (1992, 1997) this type of participation is either tokenistic or assigned. Shier (2006) explains that at these levels of participation “children’s views are taken into account” (p. 17). Both Hart (1992) and Shier (2006) agree that at these levels democratic participation is not achieved. It is mainly educators’ responsibility to arrange and maintain equipment and materials as well as determine the positioning of interest/play areas. It implies that educators create “adult-driven” environments by establishing a “pre-set [educational] agenda”, “in which case the power balance tips dramatically to other way – towards the adult” (Carr, Jones & Lee, 2005, p. 129).

In addition, the general text search query revealed that grammatical structures infused with the term “participation” have a tendency to use passive rather than active voice. The precedence of the passive role of the child over an active role is manifested in phrases such as “children are provided with an opportunity to participate”, “children are engaged”, and “children are stimulated”. Expressions such as “provided opportunity to participate” and “meaningful participation” insinuate that children’s participation take place under the educator’s guidance and supervision.

The analysis of the documents also revealed that children are generally understood as participants who are recognized members of a group of peers. This position is not significantly
different from that of developmental or social constructivism because as already indicated, children’s participation is often guided by educators who provide opportunities for participation by creating appropriate physical environments (Kjørholt, 2005). According to adults/educators, it is in these dynamic spaces that children learn to build authentic relationships. It can thus be concluded that on a number of occasions, ELF documents assign a primary participatory role to educators who create organized and natural physical environments. In these contexts, the child’s role is of a secondary participant whose main responsibility is to learn how to navigate the environment and build relationships.

To avoid impulsive conclusions and inaccurate conjectures, the use of the concept “participation” was further examined in relation to the terms “contributor”, “contribution”, and “contribute”. An in-depth analysis of the relationship between these terms reveals that children’s active participation, as specified in critical and participatory paradigms, is only possible when they are understood as contributors to their daily life experiences. With that in mind, each framework was analyzed in detail to determine whether or not young children are viewed as contributors. As a result, four themes emerged that will be explored in greater depth in the subsequent section.

The Role of ELF Documents in Shaping Up Pedagogical Thought in the Field

The ELF frameworks contribute to the progress of the overall quality of early childhood program delivery, stimulate children’s development, education, and well-being, and generate opportunities to develop a sense of belonging (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2014; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014);
Role of the Quality Learning Environment

Quality child care settings *contribute* to children’s development and learning by ensuring that a well-rounded educational curriculum helps children thrive. Such a curriculum can be described by its endorsement of an organized physical environment and various learning opportunities provided through planned and spontaneous educational play-based activities (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2009; Flanagan, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2014).

Role of Early Childhood Educators

Qualified and reflective educators *contribute* to young children’s development and learning by creating safe and healthy environments, and by becoming children’s play-partners, observing and documenting children’s interests and progress, and critically reflecting on their practices. Here, pedagogical leadership and collegiality play an important role in the advancement of children’s continuous growth (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2009, 2015; Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008; Flanagan, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2014; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014). For these reasons and more, many if not all of the frameworks equip educators with a set of reflective questions.

Role of Community and Family in Educating Young Children
The community and families contribute to the program by developing relationships with educators and child care providers. By introducing their histories and cultural traditions and sharing their observations, families help educators create safe and healthy spaces in child care settings as well as advance the child’s emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and positive self-identity (Famille Québec, Services de garde, 2007; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007; Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007; Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007; Healthy Child Manitoba, 2009, 2015; Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008; Flanagan, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2014; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014).

Generally, these four themes clearly indicate that adults and environments that they create play a leading role in shaping up children’s learning. Here, the young child’s role as a contributor is secondary to an adult. On the basis of this recognition, the researcher further explored the concept of ‘contributing’ as it relates to children’s role.

**Young Child as a Contributor**

The young child as a contributor theme emerged through the comprehensive text analysis. It demonstrated that the provinces of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Alberta are more vocal about children’s right to contribute. For instance, New Brunswick and Alberta’s curriculum frameworks assert:

Through their participation in various contexts children contribute to changes in what it means to be literate. This is because they are active rather than passive learners in the process of making sense of their worlds. (Early Childhood Research and Development
This is while the British Columbia framework states:

As children grow and learn, they ask questions, explore, and make discoveries, supported by these roots and branching out to new experiences, people, places, and things in their environment. Within this complex ecology, every child belongs and contributes. (Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Early Learning Advisory Group, 2007, p. 4)

Meanwhile, Saskatchewan’s early learning program guide stresses:

When children are viewed as capable, competent and full of ideas, adults begin to observe and listen to the ideas children contribute, fostering a shared learning opportunity between adults and children. (Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 9)

As discussed in the literature review, critical and participatory paradigms are built upon the democratic principles of diversity, equity, human rights (Woodhead, 2006, 2008), education of freedom (Freire, 1997, 2007), and radical pedagogy (Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2015). In this vein, “educators and other cultural workers need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing the world” (Giroux, 2011, p. 69).

The New Brunswick curriculum framework strives to follow these ideas by constructing a new vocabulary for early childhood educators in a section entitled “Diversity and Social Responsibility” (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007). Some of the ideas proposed in this section stand out from other framework texts published within the same time period. The section on Diversity and Social Responsibility underlines three central aspects: “inclusiveness and equity; democratic
practices; and sustainable future”, which are all built upon the notion of interdependency. The Diversity and Social Responsibility section starts off with the following statement:

Membership in communities involves interdependency. It is as simple and as complicated as this: we need to take care of each other, and we need to take care of the natural and constructed world around us. When children engage in respectful, responsive, and reciprocal relationships guided by sensitive and knowledgeable adults, they grow in their understanding of interdependency. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 34)

Despite an emphasis on the role of educators as guides, the New Brunswick document seeks to eliminate existing power relations by utilizing an active voice in the text’s grammatical structure when speaking about children’s engagement:

*Children raise questions and act to change inequitable practices that exclude or discriminate*

Recognizing and challenging inequitable practices and situations

Negotiating equitable solutions to problems arising from differences

Standing up for themselves and others in a fair manner. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 35)

In the section entitled Democratic Practices, the New Brunswick document states:

*Children learn to be responsible and responsive members of the early years community*

Showing sympathy and empathy for other

Asking for and giving help, comfort, and encouragement.

Respecting the materials, equipment and spaces shared with others

*Children practise democratic decision-making in matters that affect them*
Beginning to understand their rights and the rights of others

Practising listening to what others have to say

Developing an awareness of other points of view

Questioning, co-constructing and reworking the rules and procedures

*Children practise fairness and social justice*

Voicing and negotiating their understanding of fairness and unfairness

Identifying issues and becoming socially active in their local communities. (Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre University of New Brunswick, 2007, p. 36)

Alberta’s curriculum framework expands on some of the concepts embraced by the New Brunswick framework while also discussing the importance of democratic citizenship (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014). Although at first glance, the Alberta framework appears to have adapted a democratic and child-oriented approach, a more detailed exploration of the text raises certain issues regarding the understanding of participation and democratic practices. For instance, in the statement below, the reader is left to wonder whose democratic citizenship is of utmost value – the children or the adults:

Democratic citizenship means that children and their families *have opportunities to participate*, to make choices, to express ideas, and to act upon their daily experiences by asking questions and expressing their opinions in matters they relate to. This involves *informing children and their families* and giving them options to participate in the healthy development of their early childhood community. (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 25)
This statement, as well as ELFs’ discussions related to democracy and young children’s citizenship, demonstrate a problematic stance toward the notion of “democratic citizenship”. On the one hand, children and families are regarded as “democratic citizens”. On the other hand, an analysis indicates that they have to be informed; have to be given options to participate. The question remains – if families and children need advice and guidance regarding their democratic practices and “democratic choices”, who provides guidance for those decisions and offers them choices? The answers to this and many other pedagogical questions related to democratic practices in education can be found in the critical pedagogical discourse that addresses social (in)justice issues and their manifestation in educational settings.

Conclusion

The predominant paradigmatic discourse as shown in the analysis of ELF texts adheres to constructivism. Constructivism is represented with both developmental constructivism, rooted in developmental psychology, and socio-cultural constructivism, with a focus on developing relationships. Along with that, ELF texts are infused with the postmodern paradigm in order to compensate for an instalment of a constructivist, predominant paradigm that guides ECEC pedagogy. Through the use of postmodern vocabularies, ELF documents demonstrate an appreciation of and respect for young children’s cultural heritage, diverse abilities, and unique human potentialities. The postmodern notions of multiple and complex identities help ELF texts to advocate for creating a flexible ECEC curricula which places great emphasis on pedagogical documentation and narratives. In this respect, postmodern pedagogy creates an environment where the developmental and social constructivist approaches are questioned. The postmodern pedagogy brings with it a number of innovative ideas promoting diversity. Some of these ideas
relate to power/knowledge discourse as explained in the works of Foucault\textsuperscript{12}. However, the analysis of ELFs illustrated that none of the above-mentioned paradigms are vocal about advocating for young children’s right to actively participate in society. Hence, according to the analysis, children are still viewed as citizens to \textit{become} as opposed to citizen \textit{beings}. They are represented as “receivers of adult input and socialization strategies” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. xii) while being viewed as competent learners. There are a few reasons as to such perceptions of the child in these paradigms: Firstly, throughout the years, the constructivist paradigm changed its direction and substituted its progressive thinking offered by Dewey with economic compliance and political apathy (Bogotch & Shields, 2014). Secondly, the postmodern paradigm, with its strong reference to Foucault’s philosophical works, made the paradigm deeply philosophical rather than practical (McLaren, 2015). By not providing practical advice for Foucault’s ideas, postmodern scholars referenced in ELF texts created an even bigger gap between theory and practice. For instance, Foucault’s critique of hegemony of power for many educators became a vague and unrealistic concept because in their day-to-day practices, educators were faced with the hierarchy of roles and consequently power-imposed inequalities. The power distribution trickled down from the ministry-endorsed policies to college professors to early childhood program graduates to early childhood supervisors and practitioners and finally to the children.

In this regard, Bogotch and Reyes-Guerra (2014) warn us by asking some critical questions:

… where in today’s leadership preparation programs [for example, early childhood education] do we find deep discussions on the purposes of education as art, experience

\textsuperscript{12} Foucault’s works have had a tremendous influence on educators by inviting them to ask important questions such as, “How should we think, act and feel to be ‘true’ early childhood educators and to prove to ourselves and others that we are “true believers” in early childhood” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 39).
and democracy articulated by John Dewey, which also encompasses a love for education which is at the heart of Paolo Freire’s writings, and a place for the human imagination to blossom within the curriculum as envisioned by Maxine Greene? Where in leadership for social justice do we align with the assessment of Elliot Eisner (2002), that “the function of schooling is not to enable children to do better in school. The function of schooling is to enable children to do better in life”? How could we have come to the shortsighted conclusion that by improving student scores on achievement tests that this outcome will somehow address the profound issues of social (in)justices?. (Bogotch & Reyes-Guerra, 2014, p. 38)

Consistent with these and many other questions, this analysis also poses questions related to young children’s citizenship and active participation. These questions, however, can only be answered through the adoption of a critical pedagogical paradigm which adheres to issues of democratic and social justice. With this, the field of ECEC needs to pay more attention to the fourth paradigmatic cluster, which is known as critical and participatory pedagogy. This paradigm offers “the new empowerment paradigm” and argues that “children, like human beings in general, too often find themselves victimized by abuse, neglect, racism, class bias, and sexism” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. xiii). The central themes addressed by the critical and participatory pedagogy go far beyond the discussions examined in ELF documents. These themes adhere to social life issues that relate to young children’s experiences on a day-to-day basis and go beyond academic goals, evaluations, and multiple representations. Mainly, they call for the implementation of a curriculum for and about life, which is and should be at the heart of early childhood pedagogy that encompasses both education and care.
The aim of this study has been to explore how ELF documents address, explain, and contextualize the concepts of young children’s participation and citizenship in line with UNCRC principles and the critical paradigm. As such, the analysis carried out in the current study reveals that in Canada, there is a growing demand to expand on the current knowledge base regarding participatory pedagogy. There is also a call to explore different ways to apply the principles of participatory pedagogy in practice considering the international recognition it has garnered. The question that continues to remain is why ELF documents are reluctant to explicitly articulate young children’s right to participate and contribute to matters that directly affect them. Literature from Canadian and international sources guided the researcher in deriving a number of assumptions that can help form an appropriate response to this question. First and foremost, the researcher is of the belief that in an effort to explicitly address the critical discourse on children’s rights to participate, the state should take ECEC seriously and remove it from the market-driven service domain. Doing so can ensure that it will become a common right for all children as well as a public responsibility of the state toward their young citizens instead of a service parents shop for (Fielding & Moss, 2013; Howe & Prochner, 2012; Moss, 2013). For instance, Scandinavian countries take a public responsibility to deliver early childhood education and are consequently at the forefront of conducting educational research addressing young children’s rights and citizenship (Clark, Kjørholt, & Moss, 2005; Moss, 2013). In addition, “developing spaces for children to construct themselves as fellow citizens and competent individuals with the right to be themselves” will require policy-makers, curriculum developers and intellectuals to reconsider their dispositions regarding ECEC pedagogy (Kjørholt, 2005, p. 167). In particular, ECEC practitioners and academics need to critically re-examine their understandings about age-related social orders that impose academic norms in adult-created spaces while restricting children’s
choices and voices (Davies, 2014; Kessler, 2014; Smith, 2013; Swadener, Lundy, Blanchet-Cohen, & Habashi, 2013). In addressing the concept of young children’s citizenship, adults must recognize that they “hold a formative role in creating openings and opportunities for children to participate in decision-making process within the context of education” (Peters & Lacy, 2013, p. 119). In Canada, the role of ELF documents can be put under question due to the fact that currently the ECEC system presents an educational divide where the philosophy of schooling prevalent in kindergartens alter the early childhood pedagogy employed in child care settings. This divide is not just philosophical: it is political, economic, and educational and it should be addressed effectively and critically for the good of our young citizens. In this vein and as a step forward, the researcher proposes a critical re-examination of how the kindergarten curriculum documents addresses, explains, and contextualizes the concepts of young children’s participation and citizenship.
ARTICLE 3 – Consulting with Young Children: A Myth or Reality?

Abstract

This article provides an analysis of empirical data addressing the concept of consultation with young children. The purpose of this research study is to explore how early childhood professionals (ECP) understand in theory and employ in practice the process of consultation with young children. The study is guided by an emancipatory worldview following the view that young children have the right to contribute to curriculum and engage in policy-related decision-making processes. It utilizes grounded theory design and employs qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. As part of the study, thirty-four early childhood professionals completed an online open-ended survey with five of the participants partaking in the follow-up semi-structured interviews. The findings discussed in the article reveal that early childhood professionals demonstrate an emergent knowledge about the concept of consultation with young children. These ECE professionals engaged in consultation with young children primarily for curriculum planning and maintaining cooperative relationships. In their day-to-day work with children, educators utilize strategies such as observation and documentation. The findings of the present study support the need for early childhood educators to create their professional identity through professional development by expanding their knowledge on a variety of educational paradigms and focusing on the implementation of the concept of the child as an active citizen.

Introduction

To elaborate on the notion of consultation with young children, it is imperative to examine the compelling applications of the rights-based approach where an emphasis is placed on viewing early childhood pedagogy as a democratic practice (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008; Soto & Swadener, 2005). This view supports the position that the image of the
“child as an active citizen” should gain more recognition while simultaneously reasserting the multitude of other known images of young children. The image of the child as an active citizen introduces the notion that young children are active contributors to society. Such perception also aligns with the values and objectives in children’s rights paradigms, particularly regarding young children’s right to participate in matters that affect them (Smith, 2013). In addition, a number of issues surrounding the concept of consultation with children under five years of age have led to increasing interest in further exploring the phenomenon. Although promoting the practice of consultation with school children and youth is gaining momentum, there are hesitations in utilizing consultation as a daily practice with young children under the age of five (Davies, 2014; Clark, Kjørholt, & Moss, 2005; Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2013). The growing economic and political demand regarding the application of evidence-based approaches in ECEC which calls for “outcome-focused” education, prevents early childhood educators from seeing children as capable and vocal citizens (Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012). Hence, in light of existing issues related to understanding young children and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) pedagogy, the current study addresses the following questions: (1) How do early childhood professionals understand the purposes of consultation process? (2) What educational strategies do early childhood professionals employ in practice while consulting with young children? (3) What factors and resources encourage or deter early childhood professionals from consulting with young children?

The current study is guided by an emancipatory, critical worldview and utilizes the critical and participatory paradigms as its framework. According to Creswell (2009), critical

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13 The participatory paradigm when compared with other existing paradigms such as modernism, constructivism, postmodernism, and critical thinking takes a step forward by encouraging social action. With an emphasis on social action, the participatory paradigm goes beyond mere interpretation of the educational phenomenon and requires its
and participatory paradigms “contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants” (p. 9). Lincoln and Guba (2000) point out that the main features of critical and participatory research paradigms adhere to historical realism, critical subjectivity, mixed voices, and value-mediated findings.

The early childhood professionals (ECP) who are the main participants in this study took part in an online open-ended survey and some participated in the follow-up, semi-structured interviews. The participants are registered early childhood educators (RECE) who presently work in the field. The individuals partaking in the current research fulfill the positions of early childhood educators (ECEs); childcare supervisors and managers, designated early childhood educators (DECEs), parent-child community program coordinators, and early childhood professors. These early childhood professionals work in a variety of settings including child care centres, schools, community agencies, and community colleges.

The findings of this study demonstrate that ECP are aware of the importance of consultation, to which they often refer to as “following the child’s lead and interests”. Early childhood professionals acknowledge the challenges that exist in the implementation of consultation techniques in educational domains. One of the major challenges faced by ECP

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14 The College of Early Childhood Educators regulates and governs Ontario’s early childhood educators in the interest of the public. The College is not an educational institution or a professional association that advocates for early childhood educators. It is an organization that helps to serve and protect children and families by setting registration requirements and ethical and professional standards for registered early childhood educators (RECEs) and governs its members’ conduct through a complaints and discipline process. Only members of the College can use the protected titles “early childhood educator” and “registered early childhood educator” along with the professional designation RECE and their French equivalents. Only individuals who have met the registration requirements of the College and hold a Certificate of Registration in good standing may practice the profession of early childhood education. Retrieved from [https://www.college-ece.ca/en/About-Us/Purpose-and-Mandate](https://www.college-ece.ca/en/About-Us/Purpose-and-Mandate) (para. 1 & 3).
regarding the effective implementation of the process of consultation is related to the public perception of early-years education. As such, young children, particularly under the age of five, are mainly understood through the process of observation and documentation and viewed by the public as a pre-stage to compulsory schooling. A number of researchers have pointed out that the field of ECEC is deeply rooted in the tradition of naturalistic observation (Clark, McQuail, & Moss, 2003; Palaiologou, 2012). Naturalistic observations require educators to produce descriptive records that are subsequently presented in the form of running and anecdotal records. These records are evocative, eloquent, and/or summative. Regardless of the type of observation employed, Burman (2008) argues that observation represents an adult view of the child through the lens of developmental psychology. This perspective focuses on assessment and the evaluation of young children and positions educators as powerful experts who know what is better for a child. In such situations, the child’s voice is acknowledged and respected but still perceived as weak, unreasonable, and uninformative (Eke, Butcher, & Lee, 2009; Mac Naughton, 2005; Saballa, Mac Naughton, & Smith, 2008; Palaiologou, 2012). In this respect, another challenge that emerges is associated with the idea that children in pre-school and kindergarten settings are not mature enough to communicate their thoughts in a reasonable and rationale manner due to their age (Mac Naughton, 2003; Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008). To make up for the shortcomings associated with such views, some ECP maintain that they utilize questioning as a pedagogical strategy in an effort to help them to understand young children’s perspectives more efficiently.

A thorough analysis of the data reveals that the respondents to the online survey and the interviewees were in agreement that young children’s ideas should be respected and acknowledged in day-to-day pedagogical practices as well as curriculum planning. However, the
participants demonstrated mixed feelings toward the possibility of young children informing policy. This speaks to the necessity of professionals becoming aware of studies that provide practical examples and evidence on how young children’s involvement can inform decision-making in policy and practice.

**Literature Review**

Mac Naughton (2005) states that the General Comment No. 7 from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which recognizes children as full-fledged citizens and as subjects of rights (United Nations, 2005) requires early childhood professionals to revise their outlook towards young children’s participation. This can be accomplished by engaging in meaningful discussions regarding adult-children power relationships and young children’s right to express their views which can in turn inform policy decisions. In line with these views, an array of research addressing the necessity of consultation with young children emerged in late 1990s and the start of the 21st century (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Soto & Swadener, 2005; Swadener, Lundy, Habashi & Blanchet-Cohen, 2013).

Clark and Moss (2011) posit that consultation with young children starts from employing a pedagogy of listening and care in everyday practices. Generally, pedagogy of listening occurs when listening is understood as a “multi-faceted” and complex concept. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) argue that, “Pedagogy of listening has a strong commitment to radical dialogue that does not resolve into monologue, a monologue where teacher claims to know and speak or explicate for the other, the child” (p. 98). Radical dialogue requires educators to listen and respond to children openly and with sensitivity and to perceive listening as a process that stimulates not only language development and communication skills but emotions such as doubt, happiness,
sadness, curiosity, desire, and interest. Radical dialogue is therefore a process that activates all
senses and not just the ability to hear and verbally respond (Moss & Dahlberg, 2005).

Consequently, the pedagogy of listening, understood through the lens of radical dialogue, is
strongly connected to pedagogy of care. Pedagogy of care aims to create authentic relationships
through the means of radical dialogue. Expanding on Moss and Dahlberg’s (2005) views, Davies
(2014) explains:

Emergent listening is not a simple extension of usual practices of listening. It involves
working, to some extent, against oneself, and against those habitual practices through
which one establishes ‘this is who I am’. It represents a major challenge to liberal
humanism and phenomenological constructs of what it means to be human, where those
constructs begin with the concept of self as an entity that is continually judged against an
imagined ideal, and found wanting. (Davies, 2014, p. 21)

Here, in their explanations on the concepts of “pedagogy of listening” and “emergent
listening”, Moss and Dahlberg (2005) along with Davies (2014) primarily employ the works of
postmodern scholars and philosophers. In their writing, Moss and Dahlberg (2005) and Davies
(2014) overlook the fact that critical pedagogy has established a strong foundation for the
discourse on radical dialogue through the act of praxis. Specifically, critical pedagogues argue
that for active listening and dialogization to occur, educators/teachers need to develop the ability

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15 Postmodernism as an independent and competing paradigm builds on the works of such thinkers as Foucault
(1926-1984), Levinas (1906-1995), Derrida (1930-2004), and Deleuze (1925-1995), establishing that early
childhood pedagogy must be understood through the prism of the local, “because as we try to generalize our
understandings, we rely on ‘big pictures’ or ‘grand narratives’ about humanity’s ‘progress’ or its ‘journey’ that are
inaccurate and simplistic” (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 73).

16 Critical pedagogy, according to McLaren (2015), is “a politics of understanding and action, an act of knowing that
attempts to situate everyday life in a larger geopolitical context, with the goal of fostering regional collective self-
responsibility, large-scale ecumene, and international worker solidarity” (p. 9).
to critically reflect on social and educational issues. As Mac Naughton (2005) asserts: “Inserting the ‘critical’ into reflective practice therefore links education to a wider social project to create social justice and emancipation, and freedom for all through education” (p. 9). Critical reflection allows learners to engage with different aspects of reality and deconstruct the underlying conditions that give rise to iniquities in society (McLaren, 2015). Strongly associated with praxis, the act of critical reflection seeks to disrupt conformist practices in the struggle against the reproduction of the status quo. Praxis as an act involving transformative action and reflection includes rethinking and re-evaluating social orders and fostering spaces that inspire the process of self-transformation (Freire, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; McLaren, 2015; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1999).

Praxis, as Freire (1997) argues, embodies the following qualities:

Praxis implies no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action. (Freire, 1997, p.126)

Freire (1997) also posits that “people will be truly critical if they live the plenitude of the praxis, that is, if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naive knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the causes of reality” (p. 129). The dialogic/dialectical
nature of critical paradigms allows for a rethinking of historical realism and to remain dynamic
and responsive to present-day social realities. Praxis is a complex, critically reflective activity
that seeks to unmask neoliberal narratives and understand it in relation to economic, political,
and educational concepts. De Lissovoy (2008) addresses the interplay of social constructs and
critical praxis and affirms, “a philosophy of praxis is more than a strategy for action, since it
involves a theory of society” (p.129). Meanwhile, Soto and Swadener (2005) denote: “We would
like to […] call for a humanization of research that includes participatory paradigm, decolonizing
methodologies, and democratic processes thereby reflecting the daily lived realities of children
and young people” (p. 5). In line with these views, early childhood professionals should develop
a more holistic understanding of ECEC which enables them to be more vocal in advocating for
young children’s participatory rights.

The pedagogical forefather of the Reggio Emilia approach, Loris Malaguzzi’s (1994)
poem “One Hundred Languages”, introduced the notion of young children’s participation
through the concepts of young children’s versatile communicative abilities to dialoguing.
Malaguzzi (1994) confirmed that children are powerful communicators who can utilize various
tools for communication including art mediums.

Malaguzzi’s idea found its support in a number of ECEC research and pedagogical
projects that sought to embrace the concept of the child as an active communicator and a
competent human being in social and educational settings in the 20th and 21st centuries. Among
its many advocates throughout the 1990s, one can point to the Danish Ministries of Social
Affairs and Culture which financially supported the project “Children as Fellow Citizens”. In this
lieu, Kjørholt (2005) reminds us that the initiative, “is one of the many participatory projects for
children and young people that have been initiated by public authorities in the Nordic countries, as well as in many other countries, since the early 1990s” (p. 151-152).

As a result of this initiative, Denmark published a report entitled *Listening to children: A book about children as fellow citizens*. This report contains two texts: *Toddlers in nurseries have rights, too* and *The play is more intensive: no fixed meals and enforcing activities*. The texts were presented in the form of short stories with the stated objective of “convincing and persuading readers of the values of giving children rights to participate in decision making in day care centres” (Kjørholt, 2005, p. 154). The Nordic projects represented a new view on the construction of young children’s active social participation where children have the right to choose their activities, play partners, meal/snack, and nap times as well as the right to comment on and create the common physical and social spaces that represent shared children’s worldviews (Kjørholt, 2005).

Another initiative undertaken under the umbrella of the rights-based approaches is the Mosaic approach which “was developed during a research study to include the ‘voice of the child’ in an evaluation of a multiagency network of services for children and families” (Clark, 2005, p. 29). This practical approach to giving children a voice emerged through a participatory appraisal of international research on participation including Hart’s (1997) and Johnson’s et al. (1998) works (Clark et al., 2005). To address the complexity of the process of consultation and implementation of young children’s voices, the Mosaic approach employed elements of multi-method, participatory, reflexive, and adaptable pedagogy, which focused on young children’s lived experiences. The Mosaic approach has been characterized as an innovative approach that has grown from traditional “methodology of observation and interviewing” but has expanded to
new domains by incorporating new strategies that adhere to participatory pedagogy (Clark, Kjørholt, & Moss, 2005, p. 13). As part of the Mosaic approach pedagogy, the educator-researchers adopted participatory strategies. For instance, children independently use photo cameras for the purpose of creating their own documentation. After the children’s photo documentation are collected, the children plan information tours around the childcare facility which includes video recording and mapping the tours (Clark, 2005). The employment of participatory strategies in the project enabled educators to obtain a broader understanding of the concept of ‘children a fellow citizens’ (Clark, Kjørholt, & Moss, 2005).

Similarly, Saballa, Mac Naughton, and Smith (2008) assert that in August 2003 Australia conducted the consultation project with young children in an effort to “develop a strategic policy framework” for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Children’s Plan (p. 63). The goal of the project was to gain firsthand information from children on “what a child focused environment feels like” (Saballa, Mac Naughton, & Smith, 2008, p. 65). As part of the project, action learning strategy was utilized. Analogous to the Mosaic approach, the Consulting with Young Children Birth to Eight Years of Age project used a multi-method approach for data collection with elements of participatory pedagogy. Children shared their views with adults in the form of photos, drawings, and stories. The project resulted in a number of positive changes reflected in the ACT Children’s Plan document. One of the highlights of the project related to the shift in the use of language when communicating with children. The document employed such terminology as “children as active citizens and right holders” when addressing young children (Saballa, Mac Naughton, & Smith, 2008, p. 72). In addition, the project assured “the ACT Government’s commitment to seeking children’s views on issues that affect them” (Saballa, Mac Naughton, & Smith, 2008, p. 73). The project also submitted evidence of young children’s concerns in areas
related to “(1) family and children’s services policies, (2) housing policies, (3) care and protection policies, (4) community safety policies, (5) policies on community infrastructure and public places” (Saballa, Mac Naughton, & Smith, 2008, p. 74).

Moreover, the *South Australian Children’s Voices Project*, which was implemented in 2013, reinforced the findings of the *Consulting with Young Children Birth to Eight Years of Age* project (Harris & Manatakis, 2013). The project engaged children in “consultation about their local communities” while using the *Belonging, being and becoming: an early learning framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009) model as a framework for the consultation process (Harris & Manatakis, 2013, p. 9). Overall, 350 children participated in the project and, “26 per cent of these children were Aboriginal children, approximately 20 per cent were children with additional needs, and 20 per cent of the children lived in rural, remote or isolated areas” (Harris & Manatakis, 2013, p. 16). The inclusion of young participants from diverse backgrounds only enriched the project outcome. A number of themes relating to spending more time and playing outside emerged following the implementation of the project including spending time at the beach; playing in the sea; going to the park; eating out and buying food, enjoying nature, visiting extended family and friends. After the data was gathered and analyzed, the findings were shared with children to garner feedback from them (Harris & Manatakis, 2013).

In addition to the success stories of how these projects informed policy-making, the authors, researchers, and educators involved in the projects, revealed a number of ethical and methodological challenges that emerged in the implementation phase. One of the challenges relates to the utilization of traditional ethical procedures. For instance, Kellett (2005) argues: “A great deal of thought and attention has to be given to ethics of all research studies and this should
not be any less rigorous just because it is children who are carrying out the research” (p. 31). Regarding ethical permissions, the informed consent should be obtained from both parents/guardians/caregivers as well as children (Green, 2012). In this vein, “there [should be] a methodological shift in choosing research methods when children are involved in research” (Palaiologou, 2012, p. 34). The majority of the research methods utilized for data collection in the abovementioned projects are child-focused and supportive of children’s capabilities. The child-focused research methods include drawings, photos, stories and other forms of the child’s self-expression through the art mediums. All these methods of data collection, according to Kjørholt (2005) and Davies (2014), should be understood as ‘texts’ ‘in a broader sense of the term. In other words, children’s everyday life experiences that are expressed through various means of communication e.g. drawings, photos, sculpturing, and constructing should be perceived as a valid method for data collection similar to written or spoken texts such as interviews or stories. The significance of these alternative modes of expression lies in the fact that they carry emotional, cognitive, and contextual meanings similar to any written text (Kjørholt, 2005).

To summarize, the literature review demonstrates that the ethical and methodological praxis in conducting research with children is concerned with a number of issues including (1) “the scope with the [research] judgement”; (2) “the exercise of logic” and evidence; and (3) the validity of the obtained results (Palaiologou, 2012, p. 35; Kjørholt, 2005; Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012). Despite these challenges, research with children has led to profoundly positive results by asking early childhood researchers, educators, and practitioners to conceptualize their views on understanding children’s role in the research, curriculum decision-making, and policy-making process. As a result, there is a growing call for “a humanization of research that includes
participatory paradigms, decolonizing methodologies, and democratic processes thereby reflecting the daily lived realities of children and young people” (Soto & Swadener, 2005, p. 5).

In line with the findings from the literature review, this study explores the early childhood professionals’ general understandings of the process of consultation with young children for the purposes of curriculum and policy decision-making utilizing constructionist grounded theory methodology.

Methodology

The constructionist grounded theory methodology provides a systematic form of inquiry that allows the researcher to explore the central premise of the study while paying close attention to “the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies” of the participants (Creswell, 2015, p. 432). Charmaz (2008) posits: “A social constructionist approach to grounded theory allows us to address why questions while preserving the complexity of social life” (p. 397). While exploring the important issue of consultation with young children, the study postulated three support questions to systematize the analysis and to help the researcher to unpack the central theme of the study. The three questions aimed to address (1) how early childhood professionals understand the purposes of the consultation process, (2) what educational strategies early childhood professionals employ in practice while consulting with young children, and (3) what factors and resources either encourage or deter early childhood professionals from consulting with young children. In this sense, “a close attention to what and how questions builds the foundation for moving to why questions” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 408). As it relates to this study, what and how questions helped the researcher to explore the participants’ views, understandings, assumptions, and beliefs about the consultation process with young
children. These questions also helped determine the social and educational conditions related to conceptualization and implementation of consultation processes.

**Methods of data collection**

The study utilized two types of data collection to obtain a sufficient amount of text data for analysis. The first type of data collection was an online open-ended survey (Appendix F). The online survey consisted of 15 open-ended questions that were divided into three theoretical sections. The first section asked participants to share their general knowledge, understandings, and values about young children’s participation in educational processes in relation to everyday practices. The second section asked participants to enclose their views and beliefs about young children’s role in curriculum planning and delivery. The participants were asked to support their answers with practical examples from their practices in the field. The third section asked participants to briefly explain their views on whether or not children have the right and/or ability to inform early childhood policy developments such as Early Learning Framework and to explain their point of view referencing the current ELF document *How Does Learning Happen?* 17 After the completion of the survey, the participants were asked to state whether they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Questions proposed for the follow-up interview stemmed from the preliminary exploratory analysis of the participants’ responses and aimed to provide more in-depth information and practical examples.

**Participants and Sampling**

17 *How Does Learning Happen?* Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years is a professional learning resource for those working in child care settings and child and family programs. It supports pedagogy and program development in early-years settings shaped by views about children, the role of educators and families, and the relationships among them. It builds on foundational knowledge about children and is grounded in new research and leading-edge practice from around the world (Retrieved from [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/pedagogy.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/pedagogy.html) para. 1).
From the 152 individuals who agreed to participate in the online survey, 139 participants indicated that they are Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE). From the 139 RECEs, 56 of the respondents stated that they are Designated ECEs who work in a kindergarten classroom, 42 pointed out that they are ECEs who directly work with children in a child care setting, 26 of the respondents stated that they are supervisors and managers at a child care setting, 9 respondents stated that they are college or university professors who teach ECE programs, 4 respondents described themselves as early learning/ pedagogical facilitators who work in a community and childcare settings, and 15 of the participants chose “other” as a response. After the completion of demographic questions that required yes/no responses, the number of respondents dropped to 45 (100%). From among the remaining respondents, 34 (75.5%) completed the survey and 7 out of the 34 expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview. Ultimately, 5 of the 7 participants who expressed interest were interviewed.

The current study employed theoretical sampling which “is intentional and focused on the generation of a theory” (Creswell, 2015, p. 436). The researcher collected data “on an ongoing, iterative basis, and the researcher [kept] on adding to the sample until there [was] enough data to describe what [was] going on in the context or situation under study and until ‘theoretical saturation’ [was] reached” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 492).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were achieved using two types of instruments for data collection: survey and interview. The content validity was achieved through obtaining honest, in-depth, and rich responses from the participants. To ensure content validity, the researcher created 15 open-ended survey questions. The theoretical validity was attained through the processes of surveying,
interviewing, as well as the coding and analysis of data which allowed the researcher to explain the central premise of this study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The utilization of an online survey ensured reliability because it “yielded similar data from similar [RECE] respondents over time” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 146).

Data collection instruments

The online survey (Appendix F) consisted of 2 demographic questions, 2 close-ended questions, and 15 open-ended questions. The 2 demographic questions were to determine whether or not the participants are currently active in the field of ECEC and whether or not they are RECEs. The 2 close-ended questions asked participants to indicate whether or not they are familiar with the current pedagogical policy How Does Learning Happen? in ECEC. The 15 open-ended questions asked participants to provide theoretical responses and practical evidence related to their conceptual understandings and pedagogy. These answers informed the analysis and helped the researcher to explain the central premise of the study. The semi-structured follow-up interviews consisted of 7 questions that were created based on a preliminary exploratory analysis of the online survey for the purpose of obtaining more in-depth responses.

Data Analysis Strategies

The survey data was obtained from Survey Monkey and directly exported to the NVivo qualitative data analysis system. The survey data was reviewed to develop a general sense of the obtained results. The preliminary exploratory analysis helped the researcher gain a general sense of the data and to determine what concepts and questions require more in-depth information and analysis. The researcher determined that the themes that required more in-depth information related to the participants’ understanding of the concepts of consultation and competent child, the
use of educational strategies to encourage young children’s engagement in daily activities, and young children’s role in informing policy. Based on these preliminary findings, the researcher developed 7 open-ended questions for the interview. The researcher conducted 5 interviews where the participants’ responses were audio recorded and later transcribed. The interview transcripts were also uploaded in NVivo for further analysis. When both survey and interview results were combined, the researcher “divided the texts for the segments of information, labeled the segments with codes, reduced the overlap and redundancy of codes, and collapsed codes into themes” (Creswell, 2015, p. 242-243).

Findings

In this section the researcher initially describes how ECP understand and explain the purposes of consulting with young children. In this context, the role of the child in the process of consultation and curriculum decision-making is also addressed. Secondly, the researcher presents the findings that describe factors that either encourage ECP or prevent them from consulting with children. Within the context of this theme, the utilization of educational resources as theoretical stimuli is addressed. Thirdly, the researcher explains how the process of consultation is implemented and what strategies the ECP use to consult with and listen to children on a day-to-day basis.

Nodes clustered by word similarity
Consultation: Its purposes and the role of the child

The majority of ECP indicated that the main purpose of consulting with young children is for “planning for a day or week, or for ordering supplies for a program” or for “informing the next play and learning action”. The ECP explained:

*The main purpose is to provide [children] with opportunities to teach them through activities that interest them. This way, you are guaranteed to have their undivided attention for an extended period of time, they will be excited and listened to.*

*This is also an aid to helping [educators/teachers] plan and guide the children's day-to-day experiences and ensure the children are interested and engaged.*

Among the respondents, several expanded on the idea of activity planning by explaining that consultation is important for educators and teachers to make the learning process meaningful for children:

*To find out what children are interested in so we [educators] can take the learning process in a direction that will be meaningful to them. This often means that we have several different "projects" going on in the room at the same time, or similar projects going off on different tangents in small groups.*

The ECP respondents also asserted that the secondary purposes for consulting with young children are to obtain an understanding of what children know and to assess their overall learning and development. Accordingly, some of the ECP respondents pointed out why they consult with children:
...to find out what their wonders are and to document their journey. To validate their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings as they develop a positive sense of self within a social domain. To my knowledge it is used to identify what skills the children have and what they can improve on.

It has been established that a growing number of ECP use their growing knowledge of young children’s development for the purposes of documenting, assessing, and reporting on the children’s learning and development. These early childhood professionals posit that the purpose of consultation is for educators and teachers “to be able to observe where the children are developmentally and to provide age appropriate materials and resources”. This is because, as explained in the survey, RECEs and kindergarten teachers have a duty to obtain evidence about children’s developmental progress and to report about children’s learning and development to the child care supervisors/managers, schools, and parents/families. ECP respondents signified that they have “to complete planning sheets, observations, and documentations that are often necessary for program requirements”. This point was reinforced by statements made by other ECP participants: “Also we use consultation for the purposes of an assessment. If a child already knows [how] to count to ten and he or she demonstrated [it] during an inquiry he or she had met the expectation”. In addition, one of the participants stated: “this information can be shared with parents by letting them know how their children are doing in child care”. In line with the mainstream idea of utilizing consultation processed for the purposes of either planning or documenting children’s development and learning, several ECP respondents affirmed that consulting with young children is important because it shows “respect for who [children] are as people”, therefore educators and teachers have to “treat them with respect, as important people who are capable of making decisions and contributing to their daily experiences”. In this respect,
the consultation process is used to build authentic relationships while working collaboratively on planning curriculum activities. For example, one of the Registered Early Childhood Educators expressed: “When thinking about consultation, the first thing that pops in my mind is building the relationships with children so as to make them feel important”.

On the survey, the ECP emphasized on the importance of consulting with the children and viewing them as competent individuals:

…to create a reciprocal relationship of well-being, engagement, esteem, caring, support, to learn about their interests, to learn more about their method of learning, and to hear [children’s] perspective and learn from them about their views on the world. If we [educators and teachers] view children as competent, we need to begin by valuing their voice and their role as partners in planning.

In this vein, ECP’s assertion that children are competent learners have been continuously reinforced:

Children have the ability to share a lot of information, if people will just listen. They have many good and important ideas that can make a difference in their own lives, but are never given the chance to do so. Children know what they want, and what they like, adults only think they know what they want/like. By listening to children, and actively listening to them, can help shape how their lives are formed. The main purpose for listening to children is to understand their likes and dislikes for snacks (in my program at least) and to see what they want to change or improve in the program or to ensure that [children] have a sense of belonging that [educators] care about.
These assertions demonstrate a polarizing disparity in early childhood professionals’ understandings of the purposes of consulting with children in various contexts and for different purposes. On the one hand, the majority of ECP understand the purposes of consultation through an educational lens that mainly relates to planning daily activities for children followed by the assessment of the children’s developmental and learning abilities. On the other hand, some early childhood professionals use consultation for the purpose of creating relationships with children and building communities of learners where everyone is included and the children have a right to voice their opinion. For instance, one ECP interviewee denotes:

*Personally I feel that my purpose for consulting with children is to ensure that they are comfortable in the setting that I am providing for them and also to hear their ideas because they are the main contributors to the program. I have worked with school age children grade 1-5 and finding the time to consult with each child individually is important in my position because I have worked with children that were getting bullied and they felt comfortable to come to me and talk to me about what was happening.*

The existence of binary views leads to mixed feelings amongst many ECP, especially when frustration, if not despair merges with optimism and advocacy for the child’s rights. When early childhood professionals speak more explicitly about the role of the child in curriculum planning and decision-making processes, they express concern over the absence of children’s voices in these domains:

*In my opinion children's role is curriculum planning and decision making is lacking in most areas. Even though centres and educators say that they want the input from children, they are not always taken seriously. Children have a voice, and are competent*
beings that have the right to be able to help plan how their day runs and what it looks like. Educators need to take into account what children are saying throughout the day, and learn how to implement that into their routine.

I believe that the children's role in curriculum planning and decision-making is of high importance. Hearing the voice of children and listening to what they have to say are two completely different things. Children...adults... anyone... for that matter should have the right to have a voice when regarding their own learning. The view of hierarchy's and dictatorship should be placed on the back burner; while partnerships, communication and listening should be implemented and acknowledged. My impression within the field is that a child's role in planning is at a low. Children do have a say in what interests them within a classroom, giving the educators an opportunity to organize and expand on their daily experiences. This is fantastic but this is the only role I see children participating in. I do not see children's voices being taken seriously when I come to daily planning routine, lunch menus, scheduling. All of these things that children experience day in and day out are handled by adults. Adults are not the ones growing from these experiences, children are. Slowly but surely I hope this low role will alter.

Recognizing the need to move beyond utilizing consultation simply for the purposes of planning and assessing has urged a number of early childhood professional to acknowledge the children as partners, collaborators, and contributors with a right to voice their opinion:

When children’s interests and inputs are taken into consideration the positive outcome is inevitable. Listening to children, their interests, wishes, facts that they know and want to know (inquiry) should be paramount for constructing a solid curriculum.
Children should be participating in discussions regarding what they have been learning in their classroom and/or at home and in the community, which will then inform curriculum planning that is guided by educators. Educators should ask children questions that will allow the children to participate and make decisions about what they will learn and what their classroom environment (both physically and emotionally - by emotionally, I mean the rules/feeling you get when being there) should be like. What I think often happens is educators make too many assumptions, including the assumption that children are not capable of making decisions or planning a curriculum, yet I believe that children are capable, when guided by their educators to think about and discuss their ideas, then put them into action. Educators should share their ideas with the children - their inferences about what the children want to learn and do in their classroom. The children will let educators know if their ideas are good or not, especially as they become more and more able to participate in increasingly complex communication.

The participants’ responses to the survey were also reflected and expanded on in some of the feedback received in the interviews:

Taking decisions with children means to be with them, to be a co-leaner. It means listening to children, it is like give and take, listening to what they have to say and responding back. In my mind it would be basically trying to understand what they are doing and discover what they think. It is like getting inside of their mind and learning why they are doing it (ECP).
In essence, it can be concluded from the responses that two opposing theoretical views on the purpose of consultation and the role of the child co-exist in educational settings. To further elucidate this point, the researcher started to question how early childhood professionals envision the application of their theoretical concepts in practice and what strategies they utilize in bringing this process to life.

**Process of consultation and educational strategies**

As theory and practice find dynamic spaces of interconnection, it becomes imperative to analyze how well early childhood professionals employ their theoretical beliefs about consultation in practice. To find a point of entry in an effort to further expand on this point, the ECP were asked the following question: do you consult with children on day-to-day basis, and if yes, provide an example. Corresponding to the findings in the previous section, the responses received in this section also revealed a divisive discourse. While some early childhood professionals stated that they consult with children on a regular basis, others affirmed that consulting with young children is not needed. This is while several ECP asserted that they are “torn between the two” sides.

The most common perceptions regarding the process of consultation with children can be described in the following manner:

*I believe that educators do discuss many things with children, but there isn't much room for active implementation of consultation. For example, educators may consult with children about what activities they would like to do during the day, but they do not discuss with children their daily scheduling. If children want to play inside the classroom*
after rest time, active consultation is overlooked, because educators must follow a pre-established daily routine, which isn’t fair to children. Educators do consult with children, but also feel that they have no power in changing either scheduling or flow of the day. Asking children what time they would like to have snack, what they would like to do for circle time and so forth is possible, but only in theory, not too much in practice. Consultation as an action being put forward is still in progress.

Among the responses, there were concerning assertions regarding some early childhood professionals’ disregard for the role of the child in and out of the classroom:

I have seen, educators that do not ask children what they would like to do, how they are feeling about a certain situation, or why they do not want to do a certain task. It is almost like children are just expected to just do as they are told, without even receiving an explanation as to why they are being told this. It does happen on some occasions but not on a day to day basis.

Hence, turning a blind eye to the needs of children and refusing to consult with them was not an altogether unfamiliar phenomenon:

I think in general, no educators do not consult with children. I feel that in many settings I have been a part of or observed, educators make too many assumptions and go off of those assumptions, rather than fully consulting with the children in their care. I am more often working with kindergarten and school age children, and so these children are able to articulate their interests, wants, needs, dislikes etc. in a very detailed manner. I have discussions with them daily about what they are enjoying, what they are learning, what is
happening in their school classroom/at home/extracurricular activities etc. I will ask them directly what they have been interested in and what they would like to continue learning or how they would like to move on or extend from the current activities they have been participating in.

The ECP who did find value in consulting with children made a concerted effort to point out precisely how they went about doing this:

At least with me they do! I had a group of children interested in rocks. We went to the library together and found books on rock then I asked them what they wanted to learn. We did some drawing and writing to document our learning. We do this with many different things throughout the year!

Overall, the interviewees were adamant to point out that there is a myriad of reasons as to why early childhood professionals engage with children:

Sometimes educators consult with children as a way to guide inquiry and logical thought. Other times children are consulted for their choice of particular activities. Still other times, children are consulted as peer experts to answer another child's questions.

From the responses, it can be concluded that ECP mainly consult with children for the purpose of curriculum/activity planning. These findings are similar to what was discovered regarding the previous theme. At this stage, the researcher took a step forward and explored what educational strategies early childhood professionals utilize in their practice so as to learn from children. Subsequently, the researcher ran NVivo text search and word queries. The researcher scanned the literature review to determine the words and phrases that were used for text search
and word queries. Based on the literature review, it can be claimed that early childhood educators utilize a variety of tools and educational strategies when they work with young children. However, strategies like observation, documentation, discussion, questioning, and open communication are the most commonly used strategies in early childhood settings. These strategies are known as traditional strategies because they fulfill a dual role. On the one hand, these strategies help educators and teachers plan activities. On the other hand, they function as tools for the evaluation and assessment of children’s developmental and learning progress. However, if educators and teachers practice participatory pedagogy, they should utilize “child-friendly” strategies. Child-friendly strategies are strategies that encourage children to take initiative and to participate by taking photos, recoding videos, drawing pictures, and creating sculptures. After a quick review of the literature, the researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the survey results.

An initial analysis and coding in NVivo demonstrates that observation is used as a leading strategy in obtaining children’s ideas. This is echoed in the feedback received from one of the interviewees: “Observing and questioning are probably the two most commonly used strategies” (ECP). Although this may be a key strategy for early childhood professionals to utilize in educational settings, the preference given to observation informs us of the fact that ECP
have a developing understanding of the process of consultation. To compensate for the shortcomings of the favoured strategy of observing children, the ECP denoted that they utilize such strategies as “becoming a play-partner”, “sitting on the floor and playing with children”, “conducting small and large group discussions”, “sometimes using videos and pictures”, “knowledge building circles”, “adding materials”, and “planning activities”. Taking these assertions into consideration, it can be proclaimed that the strategies adopted by early childhood professionals lean toward educational goals and/or skill development activities.

Although in theory early childhood professionals make a clear distinction between consulting for planning and consulting for relationships, in reality they mainly work towards planning. Consequently, consultation as a process is acknowledged but not practiced. For instance, one of the ECP partaking in the interview explains: “My idea of consultation process would be letting [children] to direct their learning while my role is to become a support to them in guiding and extending their idea, and providing them with materials or whatever help further them”.

Following the compilation of compelling evidence regarding what educational strategies ECP employ in their day-to-day practices, the researcher began to question what factors encourage or deter ECL from consulting with children.

**Factors and Resources**

Here, it is important to acknowledge and emphasize that early childhood professionals identified both positive and negative factors that play powerful roles in either deterring or encouraging them as educators. Referencing the positive factors, the ECP included components that encourage them to consult with children while also urging them to see the child as a
competent human being. In identifying the negative factors, ECP spoke about factors that deter them from consultation and as result prevented them from seeing the child as a competent, socially active agent. In one of the discussions about these factors, ECP made reference to the resources that either encourage or deter them from consulting with young children.

On the positive side, early childhood professionals stated that they feel empowered to consult with children as a result of a number of factors: These include the children, RECE colleagues, attending professional workshops, active involvement in community gatherings, and participating in professional blogging. Specifically, one of the survey respondents denoted:

*If a child brings up something that they have seen or heard at home or on the news, we may ask what other children think/understand about a topic. We had a child come to school one day last year concerned about a homeless man she saw on her way home from school every day. We started a conversation about how we could help homeless people/why people became homeless, etc. and we ended up with lessons and conversations that lasted a month.*

*I think that the main thing that plays a role in me consulting with children is I want them to have a voice and I want them to know that I care about their ideas and that I want their ideas to come through our program and I want them to be a part of the planning process.*

Additionally, the interviewees acknowledged that parents and family members play an important role as stimuli for listening to children’s views. To further illustrate this point, one ECP stated: “If parents come in and say that their child has been really interested in and
engaged with a certain item, or topic at home, the educators might find that helpful in finding a way to engage children in a classroom”.

Correspondingly, some of the respondents specified that factors such as “support from a supervisor and the co-workers” are paramount to understanding and embracing the process of consultation along with “an encouragement from the professional development events [that provide] access to up to date literature, and newest research”. The respondents also posited that “mentoring, networking, sharing of resources with other professionals” are helpful in their endeavour to embrace the concept of the competent child. Furthermore, the participants identified ‘media blogs’ as “external factors that may encourage educators to seek children’s opinions”. Many educational blogs as well as sites such as Pinterest offer great ideas on how “educators and children can plan together” and can be just as effective as educators’ conversations with children and colleagues.

The findings also demonstrate that early childhood professionals were inclined to use resources for encouragement in their work with children that were different from the ones recommended by the Ministry. The most popular recourse with official recognition happened to be the College of Early Childhood Educators’ Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice document. Other popular resources include the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) document, which is known as the former Early Learning Framework for Ontario early childhood professionals. Notably, the ECP perceive the ministerial documents not so much as support

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18 The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice communicate the scope and nature of the early childhood education profession. These standards convey certain expectations for which it is reasonable to hold members of the profession accountable. They also express a common set of ideals and aspirations for members of the College, regardless of the early childhood education setting in which they are practiced (Retrieved from https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Employers/Professional-Standards, para. # 1).
resources but as instructions that impose particular rules and guidelines and deter them from engaging in a genuine process of consultation with children.

Addressing some of the challenges early childhood professionals face in Ontario, the implementation of the full-day kindergarten initiative was believed to generate a number of potential obstacles in the way of implementing the concept of the child as a contributor and competent learner. Specifically, the survey respondents and the interviewees claimed that “work culture”, “some documents”, “kindergarten pedagogy”, “school environment”, “kindergarten teachers themselves”, “pressure from other staff that children must read by level 3-5 in grade 1”, and “school scheduling” were among a myriad of factors that interfered with the process of early childhood pedagogy and work with children. To point to the problems facing ECP, one of the interviewees asserted: “I am better off working in a child care than in a school”, while another one made the following argument:

_We had some in-services with the board. The common complains that the class sizes are too big. There’re common complains related to the social problems: hitting and social behaviours. Schedule is one of the other challenges to implementing consultations and flexible planning and responsive pedagogy. Collaboration between ECE and K-teacher related to education and philosophy. Beside this, it very much depends on the teacher’s and ECE’s philosophy, if you wish. For instance, the classroom next to me is run as a very teacher-directed where the work sheets, for instance, are used. These attitudes influence me and what I add to the room. Mainly, the teacher-ECE dynamics influences the pedagogy in a classroom._
As part of efforts made to resolve the pedagogical/philosophical dilemmas facing ECP as well as to gain confidence and reassurance in their day-to-day practices, many early childhood professionals turned their attention back to the resources they used in their post-secondary studies. For instance, one of the ECP interviewed indicated that, “School (education, college) plays a main role in bringing awareness of all what it encompasses and who the child is. I learned things [concepts] that I see right now in How Does Learning Happen? at school and happy to see that these ideas are finally here”. In hindsight, one of the survey respondents underlined the inclusion of child-centered pedagogies in Ministry documents: “I am so pleased that the ministry and government are finally beginning to believe in play-based learning”.

Society was regarded as another key hindrance preventing early childhood professionals from seeking and implementing children’s ideas. Correspondingly, one of the ECP states: “Not all of society but a good percentage of society's views on children's opinions and ideas are acknowledged, but not taken seriously due to the mentality of ‘they are just kids.... or... adults know better...’ Society has always had a hierarchy, they do not see individuals as unique and competent learners, no matter of their age”.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this research study has been to explore how early childhood professionals (ECP) understand in theory and employ in practice the process of consultation with young children. While the literature review suggests that young children can and should be consulted on matters that affect them, the findings of the current study reveal that ECP possess an emerging knowledge about the concept. Educators need to expand on their knowledge about young children’s rights so they can effectively consult with them on a day-to-day basis.
Generally, the findings reveal that ECP understand the purposes of consultation with young children under five from two perspectives: on the one hand, the majority of ECP theorized that they consult with children mainly for the purpose of curriculum/activity planning. On the other hand, some ECP tend to move beyond the traditional understanding of curriculum as planning and indicate that consulting with young children for the purpose of creating authentic relationships with children is as important as planning. In this sense, ECP do understand that consultation occurs not solely for academic but life purposes as well. This notion was further supported when ECP discussed and explained the role of the child in curriculum decision-making. The majority of ECP partaking in this study described children as competent communicators who are capable of sharing and contributing their ideas to daily life activities at a child care centre or kindergarten. However, when asked about what strategies ECP use to understand and incorporate children’s ideas into students’ daily lived experiences in classroom settings, the majority of ECP responded that they mainly use observation, documentation, and questioning. As indicated in the literature, strategies that employ observation and documentation are primarily adult-driven strategies where the adult is seen as an expert who decides how and when the child’s learning experience, play behavior, or skills should be recorded. In these circumstances, early childhood educators continue to preserve the “adult-dictated” curriculum. According to Clark and Moss (2011), in the adult-dictated curriculum children are “recognized as experts”, their ideas are cherished and sometimes used for planning. This allows some flexibility for children to express themselves in “spaces created by adults”. Although the adult-
driven curriculum recognizes children, it overlooks the core “principles of children’s participation weaving tokenistically children’s ‘voices’” (Smith, 2013, p. 104). Conversely, if early childhood educators decide to enact the children’s rights perspective, they must utilize a variety of educational strategies that can help them to understand children’s views within a broader spectrum of their life experiences (Mac Naugton & Williams, 2009). In a study conducted, early childhood professionals named only one strategy, questioning, as an effective mechanism that affords them the opportunity to move beyond the traditional view of curriculum and allows them to implement participatory pedagogy. Participatory pedagogy is built on action learning strategies such as philosophizing, democratizing, co-constructing, community building, and decolonizing (Mac Naugton & Williams, 2009). These strategies recognize children’s potentialities beyond their learning and/or developmental abilities. In this respect, Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) expand on how exploring different venues can improve communities of practice:

Building communities with young children does not mean that staff should attempt to create learning spaces in which children all share the same views and visions of the task in hand. Instead, they need to create spaces for learning in which diversity is possible...Exploring cultural and ‘racial’ differences and commonalities is an important part of building communities in early settings. A community does not mean we are all the same but we know how to be respectful of our differences. (Naughton & Williams, 2009, p. 241)
Smith (2013) expands on Mac Naughton and Williams’ (2009) views by adding that the utilization of action learning strategies helps educators to produce a novice image of the child – the child as a political and strategic social agent.

In this vein, knowledge of critical pedagogy can aid ECP in their learning of how to apply action oriented learning strategies and participatory pedagogies in practice. In particular, critical pedagogy explains to educators why empowering education, culturally responsive pedagogy along with the principles of heteroglossia are important attributes of democratic education. For example, culturally responsive pedagogy can help early childhood educators to avoid using pedagogical clichés such as “attaining to children’s needs”, “planning from the children’s interest”, “creating learning environment that is reflective of children’s needs and interests”, “building authentic relationships”, etc. While taking a step away from the use of pedagogical clichés, educators can learn that genuine application of culturally responsive pedagogy requires them to actually use the child’s cultural heritage and traditions “in order to maintain [them] and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 17). As critical pedagogy suggests, in the current educational context the dominant culture produces a ‘cultural myopia’ and sacrifices individual differences “to the spectacles of consumerism, celebrity culture, hyped-up violence and a market-driven obsession with the self” (Griroux, 2010, para. 2; Mitchell & Moore, 2012). In this respect, the survey and interview responses regarding practical applications of formative culture of ‘compassion, justice and engaged citizenry’ are rather broad than concrete (Giroux, 2010). In turn, participants’ responses are reflective of the vague ‘language of mainstream politics’ that has been offered to them by the Early Learning Framework documents. This offered language takes early childhood educators’ attention away from understanding the child’s everyday life experiences while refocusing them
toward the child’s academic progress. To avoid the application of pedagogy for academic neutrality, early childhood educators need to learn and understand that all classroom discourses are ‘inherently political’. When educators obtain this understanding, they ought to critically examine and re-examine their disposition towards children’s cultural heritage. They have to pay more attention to how the child’s home language and traditions are represented in the early childhood learning environment – both physical and communicative. It is worth to notice that educators should avoid creating learning environments based on tokenistic, superficial assumptions about children’s culture. Instead, they need to learn from and about the children under their care so to find an ethical way of embedding the child’s culture into a classroom. To summarize, if early childhood professionals learnt about what critical pedagogy has to offer, they would have demonstrated clear responses about pedagogical strategies that they use while supporting them with the concrete examples from their day-to-day practices.

A need for educators to learn about critical pedagogy becomes even more important when educators discuss what factors encourage or defer them from consulting with young children. Based to the findings of this research, educators are situated under the pressure of a number of external factors that prevent them from consulting with young children. In practice, fundamental factors such as school physical spaces as well as school daily schedules often discourage ECP from implementing their theories in practice. A considerably high number of ECP reported that predetermined daily routines in schools and institutionalized spaces, i.e. kindergarten classrooms, are often considered as external factors that discourage them from applying participatory pedagogy. Additionally, early childhood professionals point out that the pre-established curriculum guides e.i. Early Learning Frameworks and/or the Kindergarten Curriculum require early childhood educators to report children’s leaning and development.
Early childhood professionals maintain that these guides/curriculum compel them to complete observations and documentations in order to meet the prescribed guidelines. A central challenge is that this process is time consuming which tends to take educators’ time away from working with children. These notions are in line with Urban’s (2015) argument:

The apparent transformation of what early childhood services are for in [...] policy contexts has taken place in this context of ‘normalization’, and, within it, continues to reinforce the consensus that education, in a narrow definition of schoolified learning, should become the main purpose of early childhood. (Urban, 2015, p. 296)

Vandenbroeck, Roets, and Roose (2012) proclaim that existing policy contexts that envision the role of ECEC as a preparatory stage for compulsory schooling entail a number of pedagogical concerns:

The first concern implies that ECEC could become a narrow and outcome-focused site of learning where practitioners might find it increasingly difficult to negotiate a diversity of questions, capacities and concerns of both children and parents. The second concern is that the focus on making children ready for school can easily discredit (and make invisible) the reverse and fundamentally pedagogical question: how can we make schools ready for diverse children and parents? (Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012, p. 543)

As such, one of the consequences for educators to be torn between the two worlds of schooling and care is that ECP do not possess a sufficient knowledge about the critical paradigmatic principles that explain about class inequalities and power relationships. A
regrettable omission of teachings about the critical paradigm and critical pedagogy in the course of diploma and undergraduate studies leads early childhood educators to grieve about the fact that their profession is not so well recognized by a society when compared to the profession of a teacher. Moreover, the fact that critical pedagogy is not taught to pre-service early childhood educators in academia restrain educators’ advocacy efforts and leadership struggles. To that point Giroux (2010) expresses: “At a time when memory is being erased and the political relevance of education is dismissed in the language of measurement and quantification, it is all the more important to remember the legacy and work of Paulo Freire” (para. 1). Paulo Freire’s work and the works of his followers offer early childhood educators an invaluable knowledge about how to address the problems of cultural, gender, and class dominations and inequalities. Specifically, critical scholars suggest to understand “classroom pedagogies as ideological productions, wherein the classroom reflects discursive formations of power-knowledge relations, both in schools and in society” (Sarroub & Quadros, 2015, p. 252).

Conclusion

Limitations

Following a thorough analysis of the data, the researcher concluded that the current study has a number of methodological and theoretical limitations.

Methodological Limitations

After collecting the data from the online responses, the researcher noticed that the number of actual participants (152) who expressed interest and agreed to respond to the online survey differed dramatically from the number who actually completed the survey questions (34). After a closer examination, the researcher realized that the number of participants dropped
notably on two different occasions. First, a significant number of participants (45) withdrew from the survey just after completing the demographic portion which required them to respond in yes/no fashion or to provide a one word/sentence answer. The second significant drop (from 45 participants to 34) occurred when the participants were asked to share their knowledge about the ministerial documents. To compensate for the limited number of online responses and to ensure the theoretical sampling is valid to inform the study, the researcher interviewed five individuals who at the end of the survey expressed interest in participating in the follow-up interview.

**Theoretical Limitations**

The purpose of this research study was to explore how early childhood professionals (ECP) understand in theory and employ in practice the process of consultation with young children. While posing this question, the researcher hypothesized that the respondents would share their views on whether or not young children can be consulted for the purposes of informing policy. Following a holistic analysis, the researcher was able to infer a number of key findings relevant to the field of early childhood education:

- Early childhood professionals mainly focus on the day-to-day practices and do not have an opportunity to develop a broader vision that goes beyond their immediate duty to teach children and record their development and learning.
- Early childhood professionals in general showed an emergent knowledge regarding the concept of consultation. Their responses primarily described the purpose of consultation for educational purposes in relation to curriculum planning. Even those who agreed that children have a right to inform policy demonstrated a lack of knowledge about how it can be attained in practice.
Early childhood professionals demonstrated an overall compliance to the top down model where policies dictate *what* and *how* practitioners have to teach.

Early childhood professionals showed that the philosophical divide between school and ECEC pedagogies do indeed exist. However, they could not clearly explain what factors contributed to the creation of such divide. Some ECP acknowledged that early childhood educators and K-teachers’ approaches to understanding children and curriculum are different, but they could not provide an explanation as to *why*. Early childhood professionals predominantly assume that the divide occurs because of the existing differences in job roles that impose a hierarchical relationship.

**Implications for Early Childhood Education and Care**

The present study and its findings support a notion that a “competent child” requires a “competent educator” (Fielding & Moss, 2011). Therefore, to understand and successfully implement the concept of consultation with young children, early childhood educators should create an image of the “competent educator” who puts into action proposed children’s ideas by “choosing the “least [powerful] adult role” (Warming, 2005, p. 59). A well-developed image of the competent educator can empower educators to stay committed to their educational philosophy and to develop a coherent educational vision because as Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) articulate: “A coherent educational vision embraces a vision of who the child is, how the child learns, what the child should learn and what the adult’s role in children’s learning should be” (p. 397). Lazzari (2012) advances the points made by Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) adding that if early childhood educators position themselves as competent educators with a coherent educational vision, they become citizens who are actively engaged in their communities, they tend to expand their understandings of children and move from the concept of
the child as a competent learner to the concept of the child as a competent citizen. However, for this shift to happen educators need to take small, manageable steps in rethinking their understandings of the child and the profession. It will be beneficial if educators acquire knowledge about a variety of educational strategies that go beyond simply stated observations and documentations. This is not aimed at rejecting the importance of these strategies, but to underline that their application should be different. For instance, children should be informed about the fact that they are observed and their play behaviours are recorded. In addition, the results of the observations and documentations must be shared and discussed with children (Smith, 2013). Educators need to expand on their understanding of the child by exposing themselves to a variety of psychological, educational, and sociological paradigms. A dynamic fusion of paradigmatic views can help educators to become more confident in their practice. It will also enable educators to move beyond a narrow vision of the child within different educational spaces. Additionally, it will help them take on socially important questions (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008). In this vein, educators will become capable of adopting a critical disposition toward the services they provide and show determination in their desire to understand their role as educators on a local and global scale. This is imperative in the current social climate where the globalized notion of the child as a citizen requires that we move beyond viewing the child within the boundaries of a neighbourhood, town/city, province, or country. The notion of the child as a global citizen invokes a broader understanding of the child’s abilities (Giroux, 2011). A child in contemporary social and educational setting is different from the one described by Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky, or Erikson among others. A child in today’s world is viewed as a global citizen that possesses multiple literacies, utilizes multiple representations, and
crosses the borders through multiple media and technologies (Mac Naughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2008).

Under these circumstances, early childhood educators can reconceptualize their own perceptions and the public’s views on children and the ECE profession. Educational empowerment for children as well as for educators cannot and should not be separated from governance and power particularly at this juncture in time when public investments in ECEC is declining (Lazzari, 2012; Urban, 2015). Educators need to be treated as valued public intellectuals who do not simply recognize the child’s rights but advocate and implement them (Giroux, 2011).
CONCLUSION

This final chapter synthesizes philosophical, theoretical, and empirical evidence derived from the three articles. It restates each of the three questions, analyzes findings, and draws conclusions. Ultimately, this chapter discusses the potential benefits of the research study for policy-makers, academic scholars, educators/practitioners, and individuals interested in advancing their knowledge about the complexities of early childhood pedagogy and children’s rights. It also addresses limitations and outlines recommendations for the field of early childhood education.

In this respect, the current study has provided a critical analysis of scholarly literature, documents known as Early Learning Framework guides, and empirical data regarding consultation practices in early childhood settings. The study has been guided by the emancipatory critical worldview that adheres to educational discourses related to young children’s rights, participation, and citizenship. It also provides an in-depth analysis of theoretical and empirical data establishing that Canadian ECEC discourses are mainly driven by the theoretical worldviews rooted in the modern, constructivist, and postmodern paradigms. This fact further elucidates that the practical applications of the concept of young children’s participation and citizenship remain deeply theoretical within the Canadian ECEC context. It is imperative to acknowledge that Canadian postfoundational/postmodern early childhood scholars have recognized the need for the reconceptualization of the existing image(s) of the child. In so doing, the field of ECEC studies in the Canadian context has partly succeeded in employing critical understandings of the child as a competent, global citizen in practice. As stated in the introduction, the Canadian education scene is ripe with outstanding examples that offer a novice image of the child as a participator, contributor, and global citizen. However, these examples are
mediocre at best. To address potential shortcomings, the current study turns its attention to the
important issue of ECEC participatory pedagogy by taking into account existing innovative
efforts in the field. Consequently, the study approaches discussions related to the ECEC
participatory pedagogy by exploring paradigmatic discourses in theory, the ELF documents, and
practice. The central phenomenon under scrutiny is the image of the child as a social agent who
has a right to participate in matters that relate to his/her education and social well-being. This
image was extended to viewing the child as a local and global citizen. Several general concerns
have guided this investigation, as the study explored the following research questions in an effort
to demonstrate a critical awareness of the issues raised.

1. How do the existing educational paradigms conceptualize the role of the competent child
in the ECEC curriculum?

2. How do Early Learning Framework documents utilize and interpret the concept of the
competent child that adheres to the children’s rights to participate in matters that effect
their life?

3. How do early childhood professionals understand the purposes of consultation with
young children and apply them in their day-to-day practice?

As part of the effort to address these questions, the introductory chapter identified the
complexities of the present-day ECEC discourses. It explained that historical, philosophical,
democratic, and practical divides had resulted in the burgeoning of the existing paradigmatic,
policy, and pedagogic divides. Issues that have intensified the current divides are due to both
external and internal factors. External factors that have furthered the divide in the ECEC field are
primarily economic. Specifically, the present-day economic trend of the human capital theory
which aims to produce highly efficient and accountable human beings who demonstrate a high
level of academic skills deemed as a necessity for furthering economic progress (Moss et al., 2016; Urban, 2015; Urban & Swadener, 2016). In these circumstance, the role of ECEC is understood as one similar to “little brother” to compulsory schooling. Ultimately, the ECEC aims to ensure that young children are academically ready to enter primary education. In this respect, academic readiness is perceived as evidence of a child’s success. In other words, the child must demonstrate high level skills in reading, writing, and mathematics in order to be recognized as a competent citizen (OECD, 2016). Hence, the essence of the ECEC pedagogy is suppressed by the high academic demands imposed by the need for language and math efficiency where the child’s rights to participate and contribute tends to be replaced with instrumentalist pedagogy of observing and documenting children’s learning. This leads to the deepening of the internal divide where psychological (often referred to as developmentalistic) approaches to educating young children find themselves in highly complex and challenging situations with socio-cultural theoretical orientations while also informing the ECEC pedagogy. These contesting ECEC discourses face continuous tension over whether ECEC pedagogy should be an instrumental and predictable application of developmentally appropriate curricula or move beyond technocratic practices by embracing new ways of educating young children. Innovative ways of educating children can be manifested in rhizomatic curricula that integrate pedagogy of “listening and care” and ignite children’s learning through educational “provocations” (Sellers, 2013). As a result, the contesting discourses expose the main challenges experienced in the field by establishing spaces that accommodate the creation of enjoyable but different educational forms. Even though these contesting pedagogical discourses are viewed as thought-provoking, their applications in practice are not without difficulty. Although, at the heart of this study is the question of quality in ECEC pedagogy and the role of the child in curricula, issues pertaining to
economic, political, and socio-cultural matters are of central concern as well. These issues are addressed with admirable clarity in the critical participatory paradigm, which argues for the implementation of democratic principles in education and perceives the child as a competent global citizen. In this light, the current study proposes to go beyond the dichotomous views prevalent in ECEC and explores the possibilities offered by the critical participatory paradigm as a meaningful alternative.

**Significance of the Critical Paradigm**

The critical paradigm offers a vibrant educational environment that recognizes and cherishes children’s differences while promoting a just and democratic education. The critical paradigm’s principles of empowering education suggest that educators should become aware of cultural, gender, and class differences that presently exist in a society. Educators have to approach and challenge the mainstream assumptions that prevent them from supporting children’s differences. To achieve this stance, educators must become literate about what role politics and ideology play in education because “all classroom discourses and [practices] are critical and […] inherently political” (Sarroub & Quadros, 2015, p. 252). In this vein, critical pedagogy offers an array of ideas of how to become a critical educator. First and foremost, educators need to start creating their own identity within a context of locality. As Freire (2007) puts it: “No one becomes local from a universal location. The existential road is the reverse” (p. 39). Here, Paulo Freire warns educators that their own cultural, geographical and political localities do not vanish throughout the time and history, they are, in reverse, become an inseparable part of their being – being a citizen. When educators obtain these understandings of themselves as well as define their role in a community, they become intellectuals who enrich their communities with histories and experiences. This idea is in line to what Shön and Argyris (1974) refer to as ‘the second loop of
reflective process’ where educators need to reflect not only upon their actions for the sake of changing their social behaviour, they should reflect upon their values to better understand the dynamic flow of their values. Taking this path, educators can uncover their own traditions, histories, and biases. This discovery and/or reflection is set to plant the seeds for critical reflection upon a social reality which mainly starts with questioning traditional, mainstream, commonly accepted truths. A notion of becoming critical educators goes beyond technical (defined by Habermas) or productive (defined by Giroux) knowledge and produces practical and emancipatory knowledge (McLaren, 2015). McLaren (2015) pays importance to the two types of knowledge and explains that “practical knowledge is generally acquired through describing and analysing social situations historically or developmentally, and is geared toward helping individuals understand social events that are ongoing and situational” and emancipatory knowledge “attempts to reconcile and transcend the opposition between technical and practical knowledge” (p. 134). In other words, emancipatory knowledge guides educators to understand social relationships as a complex process that is often manipulated by power of those who considered the privileged (McLaren, 2015). As applied in ECEC context, early childhood educators thus far demonstrate two levels of knowledge, mainly technical (knowledge of developmental psychology) and practical (knowledge about situations that are ongoing and casual) while missing on a clear understanding of emancipatory knowledge. This type of knowledge is omitted due to the fact that the critical paradigm is neither introduced nor taught to pre-service early childhood educators in academia.

Therefore, the significance of this study is to introduce the early childhood educators’ audience to the critical paradigm and critical pedagogy. In this venue, the immediate goal of this study is to help educators become critical thinkers who can re-establish their profession while
supporting and embracing the image of the child as a social actor, participator, and contributor to a society. To achieve its goals, this thesis has included a paradigmatic analysis, document analysis, and analysis of the empirical evidence. The three types of analysis have built a strong case to the fact that early childhood educators are in need to learn about the critical paradigm. For example, the paradigmatic analysis has demonstrated that the critical paradigm is regrettably omitted from the ECEC grand theoretical discourses. It is replaced with the reconceptualist philosophy of postmodern discourses that do not provide a strong foundation for building resilience movement that is so much needed for early childhood educators in the process of re-establishing their profession. The second article has shown that ELF texts are not strong on positioning the child as an active agent due to the fact that these documents do not address or support the critical paradigmatic views. Lastly, the third article has explained that ECP are not fully aware of how the process of consulting with young children can enrich their daily practices and inform policy decision-making. In part it happens because educators themselves feel as though their profession is under the pressure of mainstream school requirements. Based on these findings, the researcher concludes that it is an immediate necessity for educators to learn about the critical paradigm and critical pedagogy.

Personal Remarks

Upon embarking on this journey, I have explored the dominant paradigmatic discourses in ECEC pedagogy followed by a detailed examination of Early Learning Frameworks approved by the ministry of education. The research came full circle by presenting and analyzing the voices of educators who apply both theory and policy in their day-to-day practices. Saying so,

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Even though throughout the dissertation I refer to myself as a researcher avoiding the use of the first person, in this section I intentionally used the first person to demonstrate my passion and commitment not only to my study but to the field of early childhood and education in general.
deconstruction methods such as interrogation, contextualization, and historicization helped me to uncover the hidden meanings, evaluate and analyze early childhood pedagogy from various perspectives, raise questions and concerns that lead to reevaluation of present early childhood and school practices and finally to locate the practices in historical and socio-political contexts (Slattery, 2006).

Question 1: How do existing educational paradigms conceptualize the role of the child in the ECEC curriculum?

Article 1: Paradigmatic Discourses: Reconceptualizing the Role of the Critical Paradigm provides ample evidence from the literature in addressing this question. The literature analysis explores the theoretical evidence and practical applications of the existing educational paradigms including modernism, constructivism, postmodernism, and critical-participatory (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Throughout the study, I conducted a detailed analysis of how pedagogical terminologies are utilized in the aforementioned paradigmatic discourses and how these discourses conceptualize the role of the competent child in the ECEC curricula. While examining paradigmatic beliefs and terms, I was able to create different paradigmatic lexicons that came to be viewed as “distinct vocabulary” for a given paradigm (Moss 2007; 2008). One of the central findings of this section is that when ECEC scholars and intellectuals frame an ECEC paradigm by utilizing theoretical and philosophical educational literature, their lexicon is clearly defined. However, when there is a need to transition from the theoretical to the practical, particularly in relation to pedagogical discourses that adhere to the practical and contextual applications of theories and philosophies, discrepancies tend to appear. The lexicon that are clearly defined in theoretical terms are somewhat transformed in the dynamics of practice by crossing theoretically established boundaries of the paradigms. Lexicological and/or terminological transfiguration in
practice leads to the misappropriation and misinterpretation of terms that are, in turn, heavily dependent on external factors such as economic, political, and socio-cultural agendas. As a result of such transformations, the current study concludes that the central ECEC pedagogical concept of “the image of the competent child” has been substituted with the image of a child with competencies.

To resolve potential problems in the dichotomous paradigmatic discourses committed to ECEC pedagogy, particularly in relation to the image of the competent child, this study proposes that ECEC scholars adopt the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm is often acknowledged and referenced in the context of postmodern/postfoundational ECEC scholars’ works, but has thus far not been explained as a separate phenomenon. In contemporary ECEC discourses, the critical paradigm is viewed as the only paradigm that explicitly challenges current economic, political, and socio-cultural issues related to the institutionalization of the young child. This paradigm recommends that the child be viewed as an active participant and citizen who contributes to educational and social matters. The critical paradigm argues that this understanding of the child is only possible when education adheres to democratic principles.

Question 2: How do the Early Learning Framework documents utilize and interpret the concept of the competent child that adheres to the children’s rights to participate in matters that effect their life?

Article 2: Extending the Notions of Young Children’s Citizenship and Participation: What do Early Learning Frameworks have to Offer? provides answers to this question. The article addresses the democratic principles in education, children’s rights, and the concept of young children’s citizenship. The chosen methodology for this study is critical discourse analysis. As part of the critical discourse analysis, I critically examined the ELF texts’ linguistic
features, vocabularies, and structure so as to understand how paradigmatic privileging in ECEC create possibilities for the development of dominant discourses where social structures and actions of one academic cluster overpower another while addressing the issue of young children’s rights. As a starting point for the analysis, I explained the main democratic principles in education and the children’s rights to participate. In this vein, I established theoretical connections between the main concepts prevalent in critical pedagogy in an effort to support the democratic principles in education and the practical evidence that describes the children’s level of participation (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001, 2006). Accordingly, I critically examined how the provincial Early Learning Frameworks utilize the UNCRC and interpret the young child’s right to participate in and contribute to educational and social matters. To achieve this goal, I initially explored ELF texts’ paradigmatic dispositions utilizing previously created paradigmatic lexicon. The analysis revealed that modernism rooted in ethology, postmodernism, and developmental and social constructivism support a notion of multiple identities as the leading theoretical discourses in ELF texts. Informed by the literature analysis, I acknowledged that often the ECEC discourse of postmodernity utilizes critical concepts as I investigated how the notion of democracy in education is interpreted in ELF texts. The results demonstrated that although ELF documents use terms such as “democracy” and “child as a citizen”, their practical recommendations are not rooted in the critical paradigm because they are subjugated by mainstream ideas of either modernism or constructivism. In this vein, the study concluded that ELF texts fail to explicitly address or thoroughly explain the concepts of young children’s participation and citizenship. This is indicative of the fact that educators who are the readers and implementers of ELF texts are most likely to be left with a blurry understanding regarding the

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21 I scanned ELF texts looking for specific terms that described paradigms.
main principles of critical pedagogy and democratic education while striving to connect the dots among other paradigms. The exclusion of critical pedagogy makes it difficult for educators to grasp the most fundamental aspect of the critical paradigm: critical thinking. Even though the notion of critical thinking is promoted in ELF documents, its practical applications are not clear. For this reason, applying responsive and participatory pedagogy in today’s ECEC context remains largely undeveloped and is often replaced with the ECEC pedagogy of pre-planned play activities. In addition, educators who are not well-equipped with the knowledge and ideals of critical pedagogy, face debilitating challenges in their profession. Systematic instrumentalism and hierarchical modalities in education have divided the early childhood educator’s profession into two or more social clusters where, for instance, those who work in schools have higher social status compared to those who work in child care settings. In lieu of such socio-economic divides, early childhood educators are seen as disempowered educators who continuously produce images of children with competencies as opposed to competent children.

Question 3: How do early childhood professionals understand the purposes of consultation with young children and apply them in their day-to-day practice?

To address this question, article 3: Consulting with Young Children: A Myth or Reality presented empirical data as well as document analyses and enriched the theoretical accounts of this study with applied evidence. In addition, I gathered data, utilizing on-line surveys along with follow-up interviews. Applying the constructivist grounded theory design, I coded the data and derived three central themes, (1) consultation, its purposes, and the role of the child; (2) process of consultation and educational strategies; and (3) factors and resources that either motivate or deter educators from consulting with young children. Among the issues addressed in this study
are the application of the critical pedagogical concepts of praxis and dialoguing. These two concepts are central in the practical applications of the critical paradigm in educators’ day-to-day work with children. In addition, both concepts inform educators’ critical reflections as well as guide their pedagogy by instilling the principles of democratic education. In this regard, the study reveals that educators are not familiar with critical discourses and consequently utilize consultation processes with children as they relate to either curriculum planning or observing, evaluating children’s development. This echoes traditional views held by educators who understand early childhood pedagogy as a preparatory stage for compulsory schooling where pre-planned educational play activities are central to educating young children. Early childhood educators believe that early childhood pedagogy should be different from the one practiced in compulsory schooling. Emphasizing on the idea of the young age of children, educators assert that educational play activities should be fun. This seemingly trivial rationale confirms that educators’ thinking about children in heavily impacted by scientific knowledge and developmental psychology. Accordingly, the study concluded that educators need greater exposure to the critical paradigm. The importance of being exposed to the critical paradigm should be palpable in a myriad of domains, particularly because childhood educators need to understand ECEC as a coherent process where children have not only responsibilities, but rights as well.

The grand narrative of this study is that in today’s educational context, ECEC philosophy as well as pedagogy is becoming increasingly simplified while falling under the technobureaucratic demands of the competitive market-driven economy. Under the framework of the neoliberal economic agenda, the field of ECEC in Canada aims to develop as a recognized field

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22 Both concepts are explained in the works of Paulo Freire (1997, 2007).
in education. In this vein, ECEC in Canada embarks on a journey to reconsider its strong alliance with the science of psychology by focusing on the social aspects of the child’s life. In addressing the social aspects of children’s lives, Canadian ECEC studies affirm that in the present world, children possess multiple identities and use multiple means of communication. Contemporary ECEC scholars have been mostly preoccupied with the interplay between physiologically-based curricula and humanistic-oriented pedagogy. This has, in turn, resulted in polar views in pedagogy where the role of children has been progressively diminished on the basis that children need not to learn about but to live through democratic education.

It should be pointed out that democracy in education it not a new concept. The concept itself was first introduced in education by Dewey and later explored in the works of Paulo Freire, Joe Kincheloe, Peter McLaren, and Henry Giroux, just to name a few. As applied in the field of ECEC, democratic principles in education have been advanced in the works of scholars the like of Gail Sloan Cannella, Glenda Mac Naughton, Ganilla Dahlberg, Marianne N. Bloch, Peter Moss, Shirley A. Kessler, Kyle Smith, Arianna Lazzari, Beth Blue Swadener, Matias Urban, and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw. These voices have not only challenged the current state of ECEC, but developed various thought-provoking discourses related to ECEC both in the Canadian and international context. Theses intellectuals have demonstrated a strong commitment to bringing about change in reconceptualizing the public understanding of ECEC. It has become evident through the analyses carried out as part of this study that a number of these intellectuals have not only informed the field of ECEC but took practical steps in applying their theoretical beliefs in practice.

23 The scholarly works of all the mentioned intellectuals have been referenced extensively throughout the dissertation.
In line with acknowledging the important works carried out by these intellectuals, I propose that it is imperative to explicitly address and implement the critical and participatory paradigmatic concepts. In so doing, I reiterate that critical pedagogy is applicable to the field of ECEC for a number of reasons: (1) Critical pedagogy is vibrant and responsive to the issues that have arisen in contemporary ECEC contexts in Canada; (2) critical pedagogy promotes a social orientation to policy and advocates accessible and affordable ECEC for all children; (3) critical pedagogy is vocal in implementing democratic principles in everyday educators’ practices so as to promote education for life instead of merely for academic success; (4) critical pedagogy explicitly addresses the rights of young children to participate in and contribute to educational and social matters; (5) critical pedagogy envisions and advocates for the image of the child as a competent citizen who have rights, not just responsibilities; and (6) critical pedagogy helps educators think beyond their classroom environment and creates opportunities for shared and transformative leadership.

Implications for Early Childhood Education Care

This dissertation benefits the field of ECEC studies by explaining and advancing the concept of the child as a rightful, global citizen, and a contributor to society. The current study expands on Moss’s (1997; 2005; 2007; 2013) proposed notion that the image of the child is “a political question”. The three articles provide examples from various countries throughout the world to inform the study’s analyses and conclusions. This speaks to the fact that Canada is not alone in the attempt to reconceptualize ECEC as an increasing number of countries across the world are on a similar path. As Urban and Swadener (2016) denote:
Over the past 25 years reconceptualist scholars have contributed to a rapidly growing body of research and knowledge that offer alternative – postcolonial, critical, feminist, indigenous, transdisciplinary – understandings of what it means to educate and care for young children. (Urban & Swadener, 2016, p. 2).

This study informs the field of ECEC by stating that early childhood education and care is not just a field that champions physiological and pedagogical worldviews, but is, in fact, a social movement that has a rich historical past. It has grown into a global movement where children’s role in social and educational domains is seen as a core democratic value. Consequently, it can be asserted that democracy in education should be lived in, not learned in. It is in this context that the field of ECEC can transition into a space for its young citizens to examine and exercise democratic principles.

For policy-makers

Policy-makers could benefit from seeking out and reconsidering the relationship between early childhood education and care and compulsory school education while focusing on children’s rights. They have to recognize that each child is a “bearer of rights” and therefore he/she has a right to be heard and his/her ideas should be put into practice. In this vein, “the child’s participation should be supported in all educational settings” creating an educational environment that promotes and practices democratic principles of critical and creative thinking, dialoguing, and community building while assuring that participation in decision-making is equally shared between children and adults (Bennett, 2007, p. 65; Solomon & Portelli, 2001). With this in mind, policy-makers should reconstitute the readiness paradigm that is built upon
the principles of science so as to create opportunities for children’s engagement in exercising democratic relationships. Accordingly, Bennett (2007) asserts:

A continuous effort should be made to increase the influence or agency of the child in early childhood centre, particularly in planning the day and in choosing activities. A protocol in this sense should be included in the early childhood curriculum. (Bennett, 2007, p.65)

In light of these assertions, more attention needs to be paid to the development of policy documents. Policy documents should promote children’s rights approach by emphasizing on the concepts of young children’s participation and citizenship. The documents should utilize the critical paradigm’s lexicon, communicating clearly that “democracy forms the foundation for the pre-school” (Swedish Ministry of Education, 1998).

For academic scholars and intellectuals

Recommendations for academic scholars and intellectuals create more opportunities for conducting research with children. Ultimately, an advancement of research with children leads to a reconceptualization of traditional research attitudes toward children. The implications for reconceptualizing the role of the child in research are essential for the advancement of research-based evidence regarding children’s competencies. When taking young children’s participation in research activities seriously, ECEC researchers and intellectuals can succeed in overcoming “present-day reductive interpretations of evidence-based ECEC” (Vanderbroeck, Roets, & Roose, 2012, p. 537) and can create realistic images of competent and creative children. As Swadener et al. (2013) maintain:
The more the educational research community goes beyond the simple collection of relevant data and frames its research questions, analysis, discussion, and findings in terms of children’s rights, the greater the pressure will be on the state to comply with its obligations. (Swadener et al., 2013, p. 13)

*For early childhood educators/practitioners*

Early childhood educators/practitioners are increasingly required to create a coherent educational vision where children’s participation in decision-making is embedded as an integral part of their pedagogy. As a starting point, educators should reconsider the purposes of utilizing pedagogical strategies such as observation and documentation. Educators also need to develop a clear understanding that the key purpose of documentation is to create a shared knowledge and spaces with children (Smith, 2013). Other aims of documentation such as reporting to parents/guardians, school administrators, or child care supervisors should be viewed as subordinate outcomes. If educators gain this understanding, they will ultimately act as guarantors regarding the implementation of children’s rights.

As outlined throughout this dissertation, the references made to the critical paradigm and ‘democratic citizenship’ are few and far between in Canadian ECEC curriculum and pedagogy. Therefore, it is not clear whether there is any real influence of the UN-based Convention on the Rights of the Child on Canadian ECEC discourses and practices.

*Further Research*

Moving forward, an important possibility to consider is the need to conduct further research on the central issues addressed in this dissertation and raise further awareness about the critical paradigm and its values that adhere to democratic principles in education and children’s
participation. It is believed that by focusing on the critical paradigm, policy-makers, ECEC intellectuals, and early childhood educators are viewed as agents who safeguard and implement children’s rights to participate. To obtain a full understanding with regards to ECEC theories and practices that support the universal application of the UNCRC, I recommend a re-evaluation of the strategies adopted by Canadian ECEC publicly-making agencies that provide professional development to early childhood educators i.e. College of Early Childhood Educators, Association of Early Childhood Educators, academics who deliver programs to pre-service educators, policy-makers who impose ‘best practices’ in early childhood education, and activists who advocate for a better future for ECEC. This can help accumulate valuable information about the significance of the critical paradigm and its application by drawing on the experiences of representatives from various socio-economic clusters. In this respect, future researchers can examine the knowledge and scope of practice from those who represent ECEC on a micro, macro, and meso level. This will also open up the possibility of questioning and exploring the role of language as a constitutive right of the child as a social participant. Exploring the lexicon used by various educators who represent different social clusters will move the study from universalistic understandings and applications of the children’s rights to more particularistic applications of such discourses in the Canadian context. It will also help construct a unique understanding of children and childhood which is in line with “constructions of children as social participants and fellow citizens” in Canada (Kjørholt, 2005).
Concluding Remarks

As an end note, I argue that the field of early childhood education and care has always been known as a field of relational democracy emphasizing on education, care, and solidarity. The field has a deep sense of pride in its rich historical past rooted in social movements that have advocated for marginalized and disempowered populations such as children, women, people facing poverty, and those under oppression due to their race, gender, or social class. Considering that the critical participatory paradigm is closely linked to the need to instill agency in historically marginalized groups, I call for a return to critical pedagogy’s democratic and egalitarian dimensions in the ECEC context. Doing so would lead to the strengthening of the critical participatory paradigm and its social justice orientation and encourage educators, policymakers, and activists to continue on the path already walked on by many others before us.

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24 One well-known example comes from the Italian region of Emilia Romagna, followed by Scandinavian countries.
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Québec
Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Figure 2: Hart’s Ladder of Participation
Figure 3: Shier’s Pathways to Participation
Figure 4. Nodes Clustered by Word Similarity
Appendices

Appendix A: Word Frequency: Use of Pedagogical Terms
Appendix B: Word Frequency: Developmental Constructivism

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>B: Readyness</th>
<th>C: Responsibility</th>
<th>D: School</th>
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Appendix C: Word Frequency: Social Constructivism
Appendix D: Word Frequency: Postmodernism

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Postmodern Paradigm

- **ENGAGEMENT**
- **Identity**
- **Involvement**
- **Narratives**
- **Multiple**
- **Power**
- **Relationships**
- **Representations**
- **Stories**
- **Voices**
Appendix E: Word Frequency: Critical Paradigm

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<th>B: Contribute</th>
<th>C: Democracy</th>
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Appendix F: Online Survey

Dear participant, welcome to this important survey.

I, Dasha (Darya) Shalima, am currently a doctoral student at OISE, University of Toronto. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the PhD in Applied Psychology and Human Development Studies, I am required to conduct a doctoral research project. The study is entitled: How do ECEs and other early childhood professionals understand the meanings of young children's engagement and participation concept as it is communicated in Ontario’s ELF? The purpose of the study is to explore how early childhood educators and other early childhood professionals understand and interpret the participatory role of the child in curriculum planning and decision-making.

Completion of this survey should take approximately 15 ± 25 minutes and responses to questions are optional.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and if you do choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to submit your survey, without suffering any negative consequences. Prior to the commencement of the survey, you are asked to review information consent carefully and indicate your willingness to participate in the study by selecting either "yes", or "no" to the statement: I have read above information letter outlining the nature and purpose of the study entitled: How do ECEs and other early childhood professionals understand the meanings of young children's engagement and participation concept as it is communicated in Ontario's ELF?. Based on this I agree to participate in the study. Any individual who does not wish to participate will press “no” button and will be ultimately discarded from the survey.

Your participation would consist of providing consent for participation in an online survey. The on-line
survey consists of three sections and 17 questions addressing your understandings and interpretations of the participatory role of the child in curriculum planning that stem from your interpretations of provincial Early Learning Framework and supportive resources e.g., additional documents, videos, etc.

Upon the completion of this survey you will be asked to contact the researcher (contact information is provide in the end of the survey) if you are interested to participate in a follow-up interview.

All information gathered from the survey and follow-up interview will be documented objectively, treated professionally, and kept confidential. The data collected from the on-line survey and follow-up interview will be kept in a secure manner. The data will be kept in the researcher’s computer under secured access. Only the researcher will have the password and access to the secured files.
It is recommended that you print this page for your future reference. Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is important.

I have read and understood above information letter outlining the nature and purpose of the study. Based on this I agree to participate in the study.

Yes  No

Are you a Registered Early Childhood Educator?

Yes  No
What position do you presently hold?

- Educator directly working with children either in a child care centre, community agency, after-school program, etc. Designated early childhood educator in a kindergarten settings
- Supervisor and/or Manager
- Early Learning and/or Pedagogical Facilitator/Coordinator
- Instructor/Professor at a Community College and/or University Other
- (please specify)

What are your general impressions about the young children’s role in curriculum planning and decision-making?

Understanding the Participatory Role of the Child in Curriculum-making

What are your general impressions about the young children’s role in curriculum planning and decision-making?
Do educators and children regularly make decisions together regarding what activities guide their day?

Yes  ☐  
No    ☐

If yes, please provide an example or examples.


Is consulting with young children something educators practice on day-to-day basis?

Yes  ☐  
No    ☐

Whatever your answer is, please explain


For what purpose/s do educators most often use information from consultation with young children?


What external factors may encourage educators to seek children’s opinions/ideas?

What external factors may hinder educators to seek young children’s opinions/ideas?
What educational strategies do educators use to seek children’s input in curriculum planning and decision-making?

What things help educators determine whether or not children are actively engaged in curriculum planning?
In your view what are the main purposes of listening to young children?

Understanding the Participatory Role of the Child in Curriculum-making

5. Ontario's Pedagogy for Early Years

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/pedagogy.html
Have you had a chance to explore the Ministry of Education (MOE) website, specifically the section entitled *Information for Child Care Professionals, Ontario’s pedagogy for early years and related resources*?

If yes, please indicate for what purposes you have explored this section on the MOE website.

If no, please indicate what would be the possible reasons that prevent you from exploring this section on the MOE website.

Please list some resources/ documents/ videos, etc. that you currently use as a guide to work with young children.
What information, if any, in the resources that you use encourages you to consult with children? Please, provide an example or examples.

What information, if any, in the resources that you use encourages you to listen to children’s voices, opinions, ideas? Please, provide an example or examples.
What information, if any, in the resources that you use informs you that children have a right to freely express their views, opinions, ideas? Please, provide an example or examples.

What information, if any, in the resources that you use speaks about your responsibility to take children’s views/ideas seriously and implement them accordingly? Please, provide an example or examples.
Understanding the Participatory Role of the Child in Curriculum-making
In your professional experience, have practice and/or attitudes toward a child's role in curriculum planning and decision-making changed? Yes/No, please, explain briefly your reply.

According to your professional expertise, should young children have a right to actively participate in a process of developing a document such as Early Learning Framework? Yes/No, please explain briefly your reply.
7. Thank you for your participation!

If you're interested in participating in a follow-up interview, please contact me either via email dasha.shalima@mail.utoronto.ca or send me a message using the following number 905-510-0075. Many thanks for your participation.