

**WORKING BETWEEN CULTURES: INDIVIDUAL  
VOICES AND MULTIPLE VISIONS OF CHILDCARE  
TEACHERS**

By

**ZOOBI WAQAR**

B.Sc., Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan, 1981  
M.Sc., Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan, 1985  
M.A., University of London, United Kingdom, 1993

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*Faculty*  
Department of Education - Centre for the study of Curriculum  
and Instruction.  
The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on the tensions, issues and challenges childcare teachers experience in a culturally diverse children center. It explores childcare teachers' understandings and practices using the mainstream early childhood education curriculum approach in North America. Teachers' knowledge of early childhood education is important to my discussion because it reflects on the cultural perspectives, values and personal philosophies they bring to the classroom. Skills that teachers want children to know and learn are related to their personal beliefs and experience of not only what children are able to do at a particular level, but what they feel is important for children to learn.

Over a period of six months, I was participant-observer in one childcare center. Information gathering included open-ended interviews, fieldnotes, and conversations.

My learning inquiry involves moving and descriptive journeys from one to the next, and within the journeys are stories presented through portraiture, my poems and different textual illustrations. In this context childcare teachers' voices are heard, illustrating that there are many tensions, issues and challenges that they confront when working with children from diverse cultures. In the long and continuous journey that I undertake, my personal life experiences weave a pattern with childcare teachers' experiences about their concerns of using the early childhood curriculum approaches for children from a variety of cultures. This inquiry process begins as ethnography of voices that becomes a proactive process. I document childcare teachers' lives and their words, a deliberate gesture to bring forward whom I have come to know in a community. By incorporating teachers' biographies into my thesis, and listening to what they have to say, considering why and how they say it, I add depth to the journey they have taken as individuals. And in sharing some of their tense moments with me, they express their concerns, and boldly depict the issues in childcare and the challenges they have taken charge of, and thankfully, find release.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
PROLOGUE.....	1
The focus of my story/ies.....	4
Conflicting voices.....	6
Learning criteria.....	7
Genesis.....	8
FROM SHALIMAR GARDENS TO THE ROSE GARDEN.....	12
My Origins and Childhood.....	13
My early experiences with literacy.....	15
Education, teaching, struggles and challenges.....	16
Transition and High Aspirations.....	21
Parents' Concerns.....	27
Exclusions and Awakenings: A Discussion.....	30
LOOKING AT SURREY WITH THE MIND'S EYE.....	47
Surrey community and its environment/lifestyle.....	47
Commuting to Guildford.....	50
The Children Center.....	53
WHO DOES THE TEACHING AND CARING?.....	59
IN THEIR OWN WORDS: THE LIVES AND CONCERNS OF CHILDCARE TEACHERS.....	59
From Tea Terraces to Pumpkin Patches.....	61
From South Pacific rain forests to North Pacific rain forests.....	71
From The Pastures of Poland to the Parks of Surrey.....	82
From Adams Bridge to Alex Fraser Bridge.....	94
From the Taj Mahal to the Glass Mahal.....	104
Lake Muskoka to Lake Cultus.....	112
TUSSLING AMIDST CHALLENGES.....	120
Taught one way, and teaching another.....	122
Irregular regulations.....	126
"Broken families, disrupted homes, and lonely & confused children".....	129
Parents' attitudes and expectations.....	132

It is more than caring.....	137
Connecting with the students.....	140
Relationships and pressures within and/or with out.....	142
Perceptions on the childcare profession: What about my self-esteem?.....	146
 PLAYING THEIR INNER WORLDS.....	 151
Children, Children Everywhere. What do they role-/play?.....	152
Going mama papa.....	155
Cops and Robbers.....	159
Trip to the pumpkin patch.....	163
Children tell Halloween tales, and go party.....	166
Everyone celebrates Christmas and Hanuka. Where is my Holy, Diwali, and Eid!.....	172
 COLLECTIVE TALKING: THE NEED TO KNOW AND CHANGE.....	 177
Cultural knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy.....	179
Child-rearing patterns.....	182
Enriching differences.....	185
Learning experience: My presence in the daycare.....	187
Recipe for becoming active learners.....	190
Building bridges to accommodate.....	192
 LIVING LIVES IN COMPLEXITY: UNFOLDING THEIR PRACTICE....	 196
Individual feedback on childcare teachers' practice.....	198
 MY PILGRIMAGE TO THE CHILDREN'S PARADISE.....	 218
 EPILOGUE.....	 231
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 238

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Thank you for the joy and learning that you all bring to me.

## **TODAY not TOMORROW**

Let's think of child  
as today is important?  
Listen to my voice:  
"We can make a difference  
with our loving care;  
a child has potential  
to grow and be an individual.  
There's no tomorrow  
in a child's day.  
So let's join hands  
to vow and invest  
for the best  
that is in this moment."

a poem by Zoobi Waqar

## PROLOGUE

Scenes and Unheard Voices (*listen and feel with me the voices*)

**2001**

*"You know, I must say that we were never taught anything, any course or item on multicultural or cultural aspects in our early childhood program of 1995-1996. I think that teachers need to know: teachers like me and anyone else working with young children. Because when you get information from someone who is from that specific culture, it's firsthand experience, and real.*

*My knowledge about China and India and other cultures is scarce. For example, all I know is what they eat. Nothing in detail about their language, what parents expect from their children, their rearing patterns, their customs, living arrangements or their relationships. I don't have a broad knowledge about other cultures and that makes me feel limited in knowing about the children I teach. My role as a teacher gets harder when I have to keep in mind that many of my students are from different cultural backgrounds."*

**2000**

*"At the center we have to give choices to our daycare children since we follow an early childhood approach, but in my experience it doesn't work with our students. They get easily confused and wander around or get rowdy. Being left to work on their own gets them into trouble, or their behavior becomes unbearable."*

**1993**

*Silvia is a young Irish nursery school teacher in central London, England who has been teaching for five years. Her school is in a predominantly white, middleclass neighborhood. However, because of recent changes in district boundaries, the nursery school now includes children who are mostly African, and a few from Bangladesh. Thus, Silvia and the other staff in the nursery school are confronted with a number of children with whom they are completely unfamiliar.*

*One of the new students, an African girl, has been having temper tantrums every day after her mother drops her off. Silvia thinks that the girl simply has not yet adjusted to the classroom norms. The child has been crying since her mother left. The teacher moves away, assuming that the student will join the classroom activity once she understands what is expected of her.*

**1997**

A dialogue between two Punjabi-speaking children:

Ashkar: "Toon meri car quon chennie ye?"

Raminder: "Chot bolda toon meri quolon pehlan chennie see!"

Ashkar: "Denda kay nai, mein thappar maran ga."

Raminder: "Toon mera phara hain, mein teray nal khedan ga."



2000

**Observer to the teacher:** Amrit tells me that he likes school and that his favorite thing in class is Circle Time.

**Ale:** That's strange, because he can't sit still in it. He bugs the other kids all the time. In the morning he is hyper and it gets worse in the afternoon, and he never sleeps at naptime.

He's probably not allowed to talk at home. He needs communicative experience. I was thinking of referring him to the school director to get help from a speech therapist. He's probably never ever used scissors at home.

**Observer:** He told me about his best friend, Justin, a Korean child he plays with. It seems he really does have things to talk about.

**Ale:** It's unfortunate, but I don't think he gets along well with Justin. Whenever they're together they get into trouble. Justin speaks Mandarin and mumbles his language mixed in English. Some of these kids do not know how to socialize.

1999

**It is summer time and I find the role-model teacher dressed in a mini-skirt with a sleeveless top. She smells of cigarettes and is lifting small children and pushing them onto the couches in the corridors. She speaks with authority and says, "You sit here and do not move. Rooshi wear your rain coat. Sit there!"**

**This teacher moves around the place yelling and shouting as if she has had a bad day at home or has a migraine. She is getting ready to take the kids out for a walk.**

2001

A teacher rushes into the classroom to alert other staff of a stranger looking through the kitchen window. He looks as if he's searching for a familiar face. "Oh my! He looks something like Antoni's dad's picture on the bulletin board. Maybe it's him! Oh hurry, take the child into the back room. Don't let him in! Antoni's mom said that his father was getting the child's passport made. Call 911..."

*As I live through each of these scenarios, a familiar sense closes in on me. My throat constricts, my eyes burn, and I find it hard to breath. I have faced this fog too many times in my career in education, both at home and abroad. It is a deadly fog,*

*formed when the cold mist of other-ness meets the warm vital reality of children from a variety of cultures in Canada.*

*Looking back, I also recall the tapestry of learning that I knit during my undergrad degree. Like a thick hand-woven Pakistani carpet—representing visible color lines of weft threads that I weave back and forth across the parts until they become knots entwined in life's cloth—my research expresses cultural, educational and social differences that make me who I am.*

*Unlike some other weavings, mine is threaded from the blending of soft dark wool with rough, naturally colored Pakistani burly wool. Viewed up close, the weft in my tapestry reveals an intricate combination of monochromatic colors in woolen threads, uneven in size, rough and smooth with burrs, and interlocking warp and weft. The complexity is much like the research projects I have conducted at home in Pakistan and in Canada. Yet, just as each research experience becomes woven into a continuum of many, and is strengthened by what comes before and after, so each knot on its own exudes the strength and durability that only comes from being braided together as a whole. Viewed from a distance, the individual, naturally colored knots merge against the prominent bright colors that are still being woven. The whole design of the weaving reflects the different moments in my life which have inexorably intertwined with the tensions between theory and practice, and my reflections and inquiries of the issues I experience. The design reflects why things are the way they appear to be.*

*It has been an incredible journey of discovery as I write about my lived experiences and declare how my years of growth have fostered connectedness, as well as*

*conflict. I have lived with relationships in the community that have enriched me, but at the same time taught me to listen and comply, rather than to please myself. It is a compelling force within that allows me to feel the sensitivities of others. This force comes from*

*the virtues I have been nurtured with;  
feeling beatific, with the flow of perseverance, kindness,  
closeness and care  
blends in my soul.  
the unsaid silences of my heart  
carved in the layers of  
life experiences  
with endurance and courage  
that mature a sacrificing nature  
and  
giving birth to an insight  
to listen and sensitize others,  
to appreciate valuing others,  
to hear them relate their sorrows;  
accepting that  
a human touch in a human task  
makes me feel humane.*

### **The focus of my story/ies**

*Before I take you on a journey with me into the lived and living experiences of childcare teachers, I will provide a brief synopsis of what this thesis intends to explicate. It reflects on my stories about living life in different contexts, as a teacher, wife, mother and student, and also explores childcare teachers' understandings and practices using the mainstream early childhood education (ECE) curriculum approach in North America. The thesis focuses on the tensions, issues and challenges childcare teachers experience in a culturally diverse children center. I believe, as David Smith does, that*

*“classrooms are crystallization centers for the broad tensions at work in the culture” (Smith, 1999, p. 91). In childcare centers, teachers’ struggles with classroom realities are often not articulated, nor acknowledged as being problematic. It is within these struggles that thesis provides readers with insights into six childcare teachers’ conceptions about early childhood education and their pedagogical practices with culturally diverse children.*

*Canada’s deepening ethnic texture, differential gaps within educational approaches, and insufficient early childhood knowledge acquired by the childcare teacher all contribute to the tensions and conflicts. The increasing number of children who speak a first language other than English makes it imperative for the teacher to possess cultural awareness.*

*Teachers’ knowledge of early childhood education is important to my discussion because it reflects on the cultural perspectives, values, and personal philosophies they bring to the classroom. Skills that teachers want children to know and learn are related to their personal beliefs and experience of not only what children are able to do at a particular level, but what they feel is important for children to learn. In my view, the close involvement of childcare teachers with the developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), as one identifiable main-stream approach to curriculum which is taught and implemented in many different ways, influences their perceptions of themselves and their teaching.<sup>1</sup> I believe there are insights to be heard and lessons to be learned from*

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<sup>1</sup> Developmentally appropriate practice approach in early childhood programs were formulated in 1987 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and is currently followed as an identifiable approach by childcare centers in North America.

*teachers' personal voices, their reflections on their own culture, and their professional lives which reveal the tensions, issues and challenges they come across in their pedagogical practices with culturally diverse children. Steeped in critical curricular and pedagogical concerns, and taking Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) advice to heart — to fragment linearity in my study — I give attention to the free play of meanings in a postmodernist way to represent the stories of others, as well as my own.*

*As a teacher-educator, I have struggled with a number of questions for many years. These questions are at the heart of this thesis as it evolved out of my autobiography of the difficulties I experienced in my teaching in Pakistan, England, and Canada. Perhaps my own life journey will explain why I took up issues that silence many teachers.*

### **Conflicting voices**

*My thesis reveals layers of complexity within a culturally diverse children center where teachers have been trained in, and are applying the mainstream early childhood education curriculum approach. It documents six childcare teachers' descriptions of the tensions between the developmentally appropriate practice approach and their pedagogical practice, their issues and challenges, their personal histories, and their education and cross-cultural experience. It is my journey with the childcare teachers who work in this center and who volunteered to participate in my ethnographic study.*

*The strengths of "inside stories" are to bring to the surface the silenced voices of teachers, and to reveal what they mean when they speak about their tensions, issues and challenges.*

*In my thesis, tensions in the work of a daycare teacher arise from a system of relationships that pulls her simultaneously in different directions. This system encompasses conflicting ways of thinking and acting, namely, the conflicts between developmentally appropriate practice approach, and the teacher's efforts to meet the needs of culturally diverse children.<sup>2</sup> Thus, issues revolve around childcare teachers applying the early childhood education approach, and finding difficulties in that approach to account for the needs and interests of culturally diverse students. This thesis offers teachers' thoughts which have seldom been heard or documented; thoughts which offer an impressive and provocative range of conflicts and investigation. I was determined to do this work as a way to acknowledge and revere those who have gone before me and in an effort to pave a path for those who come after. This struggle is grounded in what I choose to study, and how I choose to study it.*

## **Learning criteria**

*It is important to mention something about this thesis as being both ethnographic*

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<sup>2</sup> The early childhood curriculum approach as developmentally appropriate practice highlight practices drawn from developmental theory that are expected to vary according to only two dimensions: individual appropriateness and age appropriateness. Sue Bredekemp (1987) makes a clear theoretical commitment to the universality in child development as she says, "human development research indicates that there are universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children during the first 8 years of life. These predictable changes occur in all domains of development, physical, emotional, social and cognitive. (p.2) The purpose of the developmentally appropriate practice document is to guide teachers and supervisors of young children to think about this early childhood education approach in their daily work and to use it as a tool for analyzing and conceptualizing appropriate learning activities for children. These prescribed guidelines place great importance on learning activities, child-adult interactions, and relations between home and school. Direct manipulation of objects is central to this model.

*and illuminating features of portraiture.<sup>3</sup> Over a period of six months, I was an assistant teacher and an observer in one childcare center. My work focuses primarily on childcare teachers' thinking, the mainstream curriculum approach and culturally diverse children. Information gathering included open-ended interviews, fieldnotes, and conversations. In this thesis, there are unfinished stories in which the characters are real people whose lives go beyond these pages, and for whom we cannot, within these pages, either resolve the plot nor complete the story. Throughout these pages, however, the reader should move very close to a living understanding of the teachers' visions and voices, their ways of behaving, feeling, and believing, and their ways of valuing the children. The narrative tells the story of how the culturally diverse children in the center are understood by the teachers, who also come from varied backgrounds. Watching and writing about the childcare teachers' pedagogical practices with these children was an amazing journey. I have concealed the real names of all people and most places. All names of people are pseudonyms.*

## **Genesis**

### *Living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories*

*The stories in this thesis chronicle my journey into understanding other worlds, a journey that involved learning through my own cultural lens and the different cultural lenses of the characters in my story. It offers portraiture of a culturally diverse children's*

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<sup>3</sup> Portraiture is a method framed by traditions and values of qualitative research that captures the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experiences and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their knowledge, and wisdom. In Lawrence-Lightfoot's book, *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, published in 1996, researchers portray details of sight, sound & ambiance.

*center that forms a stage for the teacher-artists to perform with children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. I want my readers to listen and feel, and to learn from the complex stories of these childcare teachers as they speak from their personal experiences.*

*I will consider a range of issues and tensions that are directly related to the childcare teachers and their voices. These issues include sociopolitical perspectives on curriculum approaches and their constraints, children-learning theories and practices, and the network of complexities that exist for teachers as they tussle and negotiate and survive living on borderlands. The thesis focuses on their struggles between the theory and the reality of their practices, and their efforts to create a different place for students and teachers to work and learn. Narrating these stories, I have voiced myself by interweaving different kinds of field texts— my autobiography, my poems, teacher biographies and stories, field notes, conversations, interviews, and stories of the children.*

*The contribution of these stories helps to create possibilities for daycare communities (children, their parents and teachers) and for policy-makers and others who are joining the educational field. In Chapter one, I take my readers into the lives that I have lived, while discussing the literature on early childhood educators, emphasizing the cultural context with development for young children, and multicultural perspectives. I reveal the questions that lie at the heart of my inquiry. Chapter two focuses on the location of the children center and its community, and provides a portrait of the daycare context. Chapter three illuminates the childcare teachers' identities, experiences and their concerns about approaches in early childhood education. Chapter four transcribes the childcare teachers' personal voices, entrenched in the struggle to accommodate*



*culturally diverse children. Important characters in the stories of childcare teachers are the daycare children, who are presented in Chapter five, framed in the particular themes that are followed on a daily bases at the center. Chapter six focuses on the personal and collective views of childcare teachers, and their stories about their desire to know and change. Chapter seven is a discussion that reveals individual teacher's responses and pedagogy. The informants' involvement in the learning process, my role as an inquirer, and my experience of living with these informants and children are enclosed in Chapter eight. The thesis concludes with a discussion of proactive ethnography in which teachers have become active learners, and with implications for developmentally appropriate practice approach within a multicultural perspective.*

**Blown across a panorama of life,  
I see  
deep blue oceans,  
lovely green land  
and now a seashore  
where I stand,  
blissfully alive,  
to have  
my share of life  
as student, practitioner and wife.  
I fight  
through times  
too real to mind  
and gather dewdrops  
and rainbows  
on a palette  
of rich cultures  
for another Picasso—that's me  
to learn copiously  
about life  
around me and exist.**

a poem by Zoobi Waqar

## FROM SHALIMAR GARDENS TO THE ROSE GARDEN

*Writing the layers of our life*

*The urge to acquire the fragrance of knowledge  
had made me a pilgrim,  
traveling from place to place  
in search of it.*

Shalimar Gardens, a world heritage site, in Lahore, Pakistan, is a triple-terraced garden with marble pavilions and 400 fountains. Known for its scented flowers and designed in a Persian style for the Mughal emperor Shah Jehan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is now used as a picnic resort for celebrating festive occasions.



My life has been replete with moments, occasions, and events in which I have lived under an umbrella of love, care, happiness, and sorrow. As I sit in my study, which I call my “den,” writing my autobiography, I realize that writing about my experiences helps me to understand and configure my life in ways that can be both illuminating and energizing. I have sought a balance while living in different settings and have discovered a meeting ground that synthesizes my identity, experiences, feelings, beliefs, and dreams. In this chapter I tell my story *as it was lived* in various stages, beginning with my childhood. I narrate my formal and informal education, impacted by sociopolitical and historical milieus that led me to a third major meeting ground. This place, and other succeeding stages in my living story, reflect the continuing personal and professional tensions in my pedagogical practices of early childhood education. After a discussion on my readings in the field of early childhood education over the past years, I make my point of departure, and enter into research.

### **My Origins and Childhood**

The Indus Valley in Pakistan is heir to one of the ancient civilizations of the world (Kenoyer, 1998). Its languages, which are part of the culture of the people of this region, also have ancient roots. These languages were not generally used in the domains of power because the rulers of this region were traditionally foreigners. These foreigners—whether Achaeminian or Iranian, Greek or Muslim Arabian, Turk or Afghan or British—all contributed to the indigenous languages, making the vocabulary multilingual and varied (Duranni, 1995). As the indigenous people of this area converted to Islam, the Arabic and Persian words became part of their Islamic identity and remain so. Their religion, Islam, still plays a fundamental role in the lives of Pakistani families. The social activities of families today are largely based on religious and cultural values. Families vary greatly in the degree to which they hold traditional religious beliefs and cultural norms. Socioeconomic factors dominate Pakistani society. Values and traditions (Qaderain aur Rawaj) play between different classes in ways that leave a deep impact on the structure of this society. While many languages are spoken in Pakistan, Urdu and English are the official languages.

My parents live in the city of Lahore, the capital of Punjab, which is the largest province in Pakistan. I am born in Lahore, the third child of a middle class Muslim family. Our extended family includes my maternal grandparents and aunts and uncles. My father works in the Customs and Excise Department of the government of Pakistan, and my mother is a housewife. Both parents are remarkably noble and much admired in the community. They raise their children, my elder sister, two brothers and myself, in a congenial atmosphere where the main focus is our education. No sacrifice is too great to forward our education. Fortunately, books and the tradition of study are not alien in our family. My mother is stricter than my father, and whenever she assigns a household chore, she means business. From her I learn to be efficient and committed, drawing pleasure in a job well done, no matter how mundane.

From the age of three I attend the Convent of Jesus and Mary, a private English missionary school in Lahore. The city of Lahore, seat of the ‘Mughal Empire’ in India, is the cultural and historic center of Pakistan and is also renowned for its educational institutions. Many historians have called it the “Paris of the East.” I am taught from nursery to grade ten by Irish nuns who believe intensely in discipline and high moral values. The environment of school, together with the atmosphere at home, inspires me to concentrate on my education with discipline, faith and loyalty as the mottoes in my life.

All the adults in our family speak Urdu. My teachers expect me to speak English at

*Going through my school album, I discover a black and white picture of myself wearing a school uniform. It is Grade 2, and I am sitting in the third row with my partner Terrisa. I remember that one day, she brings a small plastic container of dry white milk to school. The teacher is writing some notes when Terrisa offers me her snack. I look at her and take a sip of the dry milk. Suddenly, a bell rings and it's break time. Later, Terrisa is going to take me to see her choir practice inside the church. I have never been there before.*

school and at home, to become bilingual. Since we live in the province of Punjab, I am also exposed to the Punjabi that is spoken only between my grandparents. Learning three languages simultaneously is an enriching experience that gives me confidence in myself as a learner, and a sense of excitement for the power of words. According to my mother, trilingualism is an asset, and receiving education in the English system will offer better prospects for her children. She devotedly follows our school program by monitoring our daily homework and quarterly report cards, and attending parent-teacher meetings. Thanks to her, I always aspire to excel in whatever I do and have succeeded as a result.

*Bless my mother!*

### **My early experiences with literacy**

Besides learning languages, I feel fortunate to come from a family that values telling stories. My parents, aunts and uncles all read to us. My mother relates stories of her childhood days and my father discusses everything from religion to everyday realities. My aunts read us

*I am six years old and my father is sitting with me and my two brothers and elder sister. He tells us that the Prophet Mohammad (may peace be upon him), loved little children very much. The Prophet used a gentle tone and enjoyed playing with children. When the Prophet would pray, sometimes his grandchildren would sit on his back and he would stay in that position till they left. The children loved and cherished the moments they spent with the Prophet. I wish I had been there too.*

popular stories like *Alladin and Forty Thieves*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Bachon ki donia (Children's World)* found in an Urdu language magazine.

I am a playful kid, the first one to line up for games' period when the school bell rings after social studies class (*a dry subject for me and most of my friends*). I do gymnastics and play netball and baseball. I love playing netball no matter where on the field I am placed. I also take part in annual sports events, experiencing the excitement of the World Sport Tournaments.

## **Education, teaching, struggles and challenges**

In the fall of 1977, I join the College of Home Economics in Lahore and complete four years of an integrated B.Sc. program and two years of a Master's program in Child Development. The four years of coursework are a rigorous program of theory and practice. After graduating, I have many options in selecting a professional field to enhance my educational profile. My family and relatives had long observed my association with small children when I was a child myself, and it seems I am naturally inclined towards the field of child development, which becomes my major field of study.

The core courses in child development enable me to develop the strong conviction that every child is an individual and that the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and moral development of the child are interrelated. It is during my brief teaching period in the final year of my Master's program that I learn that play is a schema which contributes a vital role in children's development. I remember during my teaching experience in Pakistan how children representing different provinces of Pakistan played in the housekeeping corner, took on social roles and enacted these roles with one another, learning, sharing, solving differences and accommodating one another. Although these children would speak their ethnic language at home, the medium of instruction in schools was English language, and so they all conversed in the school language.<sup>4</sup> To me, play is

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<sup>4</sup> Many early childhood educators find children's language other than English as a barrier to the classroom learning. Early states (1990) that more than 50 percent of the school population in several Metro-Toronto and Vancouver school systems do not have English as a first language. Bilingual education is an issue at all levels of education, but in early childhood the issue is somewhat more complex because young children are at the earliest stages of primary language acquisition. Research by Fillmore (1991) raises concerns that emphases on second language acquisition at too early an age can harm primary language proficiency and interfere with family communications.

never-ending. Children constantly invent new images and symbols that they encounter from their surroundings.

Although I wish to work as a child psychologist, I am bound by parental constraints. I begin teaching in a preparatory school comprised of preschool and kindergarten. It is here that I apply my theoretical knowledge to my practice and to the testing of its validity. I am aware of and responsive to the demands and expectations of others. An example of this is my interest in planning activities where learning takes place through play.<sup>5</sup> There is great concern on behalf of the parents: *What do children learn through play? Why play in the classroom?* I try to discuss the importance of learning through playful activities with my colleagues, with parents and the principal. In my own class, I emphasize the aspects of play, amusement and work in the educative process. However, there exists a list of hierarchical academic skills that are expected of all students, some as young as three years old. It upsets me that these young children are expected to perform much overly structured activities. In addition to this preparatory school experience, I participate actively in countrywide seminars and workshops that provide me with critical insight into the issues of teaching.

In the spring of 1990, my marriage to Waqar, a civil engineer is arranged. A new role is thus assigned to me, added to my many others. The commitments I have taken on stretch me to the limits, and I face differences and challenges in my life.

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<sup>5</sup> The developmentally appropriate practice approach in early childhood curriculum emphasizes that the learning activities should be child-initiated, child-centered, teacher supported so that learning occurs primarily through play, projects and at learning centers that are consistent with children's current interests and ideas.



However, my persistence in working patiently and efficiently reinforces my determination to overcome these challenges. My career as an early childhood education supervisor at Over-Seas Pakistani Foundation College in Islamabad (O.P.F.), Pakistan starts in August, 1990. I establish a preschool and formulate its curriculum goals for the first time in O. P. F. College history. I work not only with children, but also with parents and staff members. This preschool earns enormous fame within the short span of one year. I am soon promoted to Early Childhood Coordinator. My teaching experience there provides me with an opportunity to meet new teachers, and reveals to me the human and academic problems that exist in the process of transition faced by early learners and their teachers at school. I have many queries regarding the teaching methodology. These teachers have little training in child development, which results in intellectual differences.<sup>6</sup> I question them: *Why are children taught to write numbers and alphabets at the age of three? Why are children's curiosities suppressed?* I keep trying to merge child development theory into a practice that is appropriate to meet the challenges and needs of the Pakistani child, but I feel restricted.

In 1992, I am awarded a Britannia Scholarship from the British Council to study for an M.A. in Child Development and Early Childhood Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, England. My loving parents are not to share in this great honor, however. My father passes away in November, 1991, and my mother follows just six months later. I am shattered by this great loss and feel very much alone. I cannot

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<sup>6</sup> My fellow colleagues at Overseas Pakistani Foundation College Islamabad Pakistan had no training in early childhood education. Their sources on child development have been an advice from the other staff or classroom experience. These staff members gained little information on child development as they have specialized in other disciplines.

find solace anywhere. In these moments of intense grief, I turn to God:

**A tumult of wings coos me  
along moonbeams to  
their carnival in heaven.  
I see my parents' haven  
and His beatitude  
lifts me up to fluoresce  
all carnivals here as ever.  
Since then I am all smiles  
and smilingly give, the promise.**

Zoobi Waqar September, 1999

Soon after, I leave for England with my husband and one-year-old son, Rafay. Things are happening at a fast pace at this time in my life. Within the span of two years, I marry, have a son, lose my parents, and leave Pakistan for England. For the first time in my life, I have to leave behind my brothers, sister, and country.

I complete my research at the Institute of Education, England in the department of Child Development. My thesis is entitled, "An investigation into the relationships between the expectations held by Nursery teachers, Reception teachers and Parents of what children should be able to do or know when transferring from preschool to primary school." I conduct this research at sixteen schools in London.

The results of the study indicate that parents and nursery teachers have high expectations for children to learn basic skills as compared to reception teachers, who are to receive the children in kindergarten.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after, I

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<sup>7</sup> The aim of my Masters dissertation in London, England in 1992-1993 was to discover whether three groups of adults closely involved with the child, agreed in their expectations of nursery children as to what children should achieve by the time they leave nursery school. The questionnaire was distributed via the Head teachers of sixteen schools with self-addressed envelopes. Completed questionnaires received, indicated 62.5 % response rate. The CHI-square technique was used for fifty-seven items that were analysed. In this study reception teachers showed the least expectations of the child's capability on leaving the nursery school that may be due to reception curriculum which is not coherent with nursery education. It is therefore, imperative for primary school experience to relate to preschool if learning is to be meaningful.

face separation syndrome when my husband and one-and-a-half-year-old son return to Pakistan, leaving me alone in the alien land. I feel sad, and tears well up in my eyes whenever I see a child. I am tortured by thoughts that my son will come to harm because I am not there to protect him.

It is January, 1993, and Rafay and my husband have just left for Pakistan. Every step I take I hear my son's voice calling, "Ma, Ma." I do not like to breathe anymore without him. I hate going down to the dining hall to eat, sitting amongst new faces. My silent, dark, and lonely room haunts me and I cry, cry and cry loudly. My husband and son have been home three days and still Waqar has not phoned me. I do not know why I am here, away from my little one.

I visit my doctor, who suggests anti-depressant drugs and says aerobic exercise might help. I listen to the doctor and join an aerobics class, paying two pounds for each session. It works.

During my research project I observe children from different cultures attending the preschools in central London. Most of the preschools are part-time and emphasize self-help and play activities. There is no formal instruction to help the children learn and neither is there much parental involvement. Despite the teachers' efforts to brainstorm before planning and creating their activities, some of the nursery teachers ignore the children, leaving them to cry after their parents drop them off at school. On one occasion, a nursery teacher tells an African child to stop participating in the classroom activity because he is being too vocal. My research project in London answers some of my queries, but at the same time raises new issues for me to consider because I find a lack of research done on cultural diversity in early childhood education.

After staying in London without my family for nine months and completing my degree, I return to Pakistan. I go back to work with a strong conviction to incorporate relevant "hands-on" child activities across the learning centers. I organize workshops and seminars focusing on child development, an important discipline to be reviewed by

colleagues who are working with young children. I find the work enjoyable. At the same time, though, I wonder if it will inspire much change in my colleagues' teaching. I confront bureaucratic, institutional and structural challenges in my teaching practice in Pakistan.

In 1994, I leave my work to have my second child. Upon my return, I find that the school principal has declared the segregation of children in nursery classrooms. Boys and girls are placed in separate sections, far away from each other. I am reminded of past times when in almost every house, partitions were used between the *Mardana* (men's quarters) where men socialized and drank *qahwa* (herbal tea), and the *Zanana* (women's quarters) where females interacted. I can see the authority of the adult mind stomping on the thinking and growth of children. My desire to work with young children in that institution is curbed as I struggle to teach under such constraints, but I remain quiet.

In the summer of 1995 I formulate a feasibility report for the establishment of another section of preschool and kindergarten.<sup>8</sup> The project gets approved, and the building is completed. The mission is successful.

### **Transition and High Aspirations**

My husband and I have high aspirations to enhance our own educational profiles and find an environment where we can best put our endeavors to work. With a clear sense of purpose, we immigrate to Canada in the winter of 1996. Initially, the transitional phase

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<sup>8</sup> I am assigned to provide the principal with the details about the lay-out of the new nursery section that will have four huge rooms for nursery and kindergarten classrooms. Furniture for twenty students with one teacher in each class, and the total cost is to be given. I have to inquire different furniture shops for their cost proposals to find out what could meet our demands and funding. An approximated amount is given. Finally the feasibility report gets its funding sanctioned from the Ministry responsible for Labours and Overseas Pakistani Foundation.

is tough as we leave behind our families and our home, and encounter problems with integrating into the new society.

After six months of anxiety, things begin to move. My spouse and my son start school the same day. Rafay enters kindergarten and my husband joins a Master's program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). In December of 1996, I struggle with bureaucratic wrangling to get early childhood education certification from the manager of Early Childhood Programs at the Community Care Facilities Branch in Victoria, B.C. I am shocked and outraged to learn that my Master's degree from Punjab University is thought to be outdated by the early childhood education Community Care Facilities Branch, and that my Masters degree from London is not considered equal to the post-secondary early childhood education diploma in Canada. The Childcare Branch in Victoria takes nine months to give their verdict. In order to obtain early childhood education certification, I am required to take a first aid program, and to complete four hundred hours of practicum in a licensed childcare facility. It seems absurd to me that my ten years of classroom experience with young children are not recognized. I am distressed by the rigidity of the B.C. childcare system and its discrimination towards new immigrants seeking early childhood education certification.<sup>9</sup>

I opt to work in a childcare center on a voluntary basis to complete my four hundred hours of practicum. Within six months, I am made the supervisor of that

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<sup>9</sup> I apply that early childhood educator's license in 1996 and receive a document from the manager of ECE at Community Care Facilities Branch stating, "You have been granted equivalency in two courses based on your training at the University of London. Your training at the University of Punjab is in a related field but more than ten years old and therefore, we cannot assess your transcripts from the University of Punjab."

childcare center. It is here that I come to know the rules and regulations of the field of early childhood education in North America.

The childcare center is comprised of children from different cultures. During my time there, I discover many issues faced by the adults in the childcare setting. For instance, even if childcare teachers understand and accept that children need some clarification or help to perform successfully at different learning corners, they are pressured to maintain the framed activity schedules of early childhood education policy and the center director. Moreover, I observe how teachers marginalize children from different cultures. For example, sometimes a child enters the center disturbed and grumpy. Some teachers leave the child to cry, or sometimes make her/him sit alone in the corner for a couple of minutes before joining the other children in the activity.

For “show and tell” one day, the children are expected to bring a toy from home to share with the group. I observe that the Punjabi Sikh children will not speak during their turn. The teachers interpret this silence as shyness, or a lack of self-confidence. But in my view, there exists a language barrier which could have been addressed with understanding rather than alienation. Many times, I speak with these children in their language and then see them working independently at different learning corners.

My more recent experience as an early childhood educator in Surrey and Vancouver childcare centers has been that preschool teachers frequently misunderstand the actions of culturally diverse children. For example, when a child remains quiet for a certain period of time, the silence is often interpreted as immaturity, or lack of second-language (English) acquisition, rather than as a normal response to a culturally different environment.

My work as a childcare teacher compels me to look into the research done in the field of early childhood education in Canada. In my quest to understand early childhood education, I find the doctorate program offered by the Center for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction and early childhood education compatible with my own area of interest. This discovery ultimately lands me at University of British Columbia. This change culminates in my travel from the Shalimar Gardens of Lahore, Pakistan to the Rose Gardens of the University of British Columbia. It is a wonderful feeling, living near the gardens and experiencing different experiences.

My educational profile, teaching experiences, and courses at University of British Columbia form a template to observe and envision the difficulties of using early childhood education policy as a model. My work experience as an early childhood teacher in Vancouver, and as a graduate student working on two research projects, (one a nation-wide study and the other a pilot project between Berwick School and UBC) is insightful and makes me understand the value of doing research with teachers. The first project is a nation-wide study called 'You Bet I Care.' It takes place in 1998 in seven provinces across Canada, examining the quality of Canadian childcare centers and identifying variables that relate to center quality such as center characteristics, staff wages and working conditions and staff characteristics and attitudes.<sup>10</sup> During data collection, I observe ten childcare facilities that have different programs for infants and toddlers, and preschool programs for children between the ages of a few months up to five years.

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<sup>10</sup> In 'You Bet I Care' Goelman, H., Doherty, G., Lero, D., LaGrange & Tougas, J. (2000) recommend the extreme variation in both child policies and child care quality across jurisdictions must be addressed.

I investigate teacher-child interactions and the context of the facility where these interactions take place. I use childcare interaction scales, infant and toddler environment scales and early childhood environment scales. I stay at each childcare center for six to seven hours and discover that there are few childcare services or individuals whose practices are based on racial equality. In fact, there are times that the teachers' expressions, voices and physical presence in the classroom are alarming. (*It frightens me to contemplate the lessons these children are learning from such aggressive and hurtful teachers.*) One incident that particularly affects me is the sight of a teacher picking up her daycare children and thrusting them onto black couches while shouting roughly: "Sit here, and do not move! Rooshi, wear your jacket and sit there!"

There are many preschools and childcare centers where children from diverse backgrounds do not see their cultures reflected in the classroom. This may make the children feel devalued and rejected. There are many facilities where racial prejudice is not addressed and where children are not helped to understand that they are part of a culturally diverse society. For instance, I see a preschool Caucasian boy who refuses to sit beside an Asian girl. The teacher ignores the problem and lets the boy sit beside herself instead. My experience in the research project, 'You Bet I Care' teaches me that the tools I am using are too academic, and too distancing from my community. I come to realize that these tools, these measurable variables and outcomes, do not relate in any way to the human beings they supposedly represent.

The second project is intensive and illuminating. At the beginning of September, 1999, Berwick School, operated by the Developmental Disabilities Association in partnership with the University of British Columbia, offers an early intervention program



for four children (aged 3-5) diagnosed with Autism. The goal of this program is to provide Autistic children with effective teaching and support so they may acquire the skills needed to eventually participate fully in a regular school system. The full-time early childhood teacher, my supervisor/professor, and I are involved with these four children on a 1-1 ratio to provide individual instruction. The classroom is structured using a visual/communicative approach in which developmentally sequenced skills are taught using basic attention, imitation, and receptive language. Motor skills are taught through individual formats in a system of praise and rewards. We work closely with the children and record our experiences in our journals. Each week we meet to discuss the children's behavior, and what motivates them to perform certain actions in certain contexts. Prior to my involvement in this year-long project, I had believed that research was only about check sheets, control groups, statistical analyses and significant findings. But the Berwick School project is an inquiry of a different, qualitative nature. I work directly with the teacher and so gain the teacher's conceptions, which is her valuable contribution to others working in the same area.

**Writing about my experiences provides a reference for early childhood teachers that could be helpful in understanding the social and political contexts of these conflicts. I have shared these tensions and challenges in an attempt to explain myself and to show that I am an early childhood practitioner with many other roles to play in life. Each role is important, and influences the other roles. Again, I write the following *as it was lived*.**

During my work with autistic children at Berwick, I also coordinate with the other staff of the school to work on multicultural aspect to be brought into the classrooms. I plan with them and inform them about our visit to the Multicultural Resource Center located at Broadway in Vancouver. A few staff members approach me giving an excuse that it is not a suitable time for them to visit. I try to reschedule with the center but it did not work with the teachers.

### **Parents' Concerns**

As a parent, I am engaged in my children's education to help them understand the different terrain of public schooling. I am dismayed to see how children from other cultures are assumed to be lacking in the appropriate tools (eg. to select from given choices, and classroom behavior). I never want to see myself distanced from the early childhood education evaluation system ever again. Before my younger child gains entry into kindergarten, the Vancouver School Board requires her to undergo a written test. I have to prepare my child to go through the prescribed expectations of the school board. A coordinator escorts her into a room that appears to be a higher-grade classroom with large desks and chairs containing examination papers and stationery. The examiner tells me, "Parents are not allowed to stay in the classroom. It's our policy." As I try to exit, my daughter takes my hand, and with tears in her eyes, says, "I want you to stay, mama." The moment I bring her back into the room I realize that she is being given a typed examination paper that requires her to read and follow the instructions, and then fill in the information. Astonished, I think, 'What on earth are these people trying to assess from a four-and-a-half-year-old?' I wonder if *a white, Canadian-born child would also have to go through such weird and deficit assessment procedures*. Furious, I take the issue to the

administration office. My daughter is given a second appointment, to take her interview test.

The interview is conducted by another white woman who takes my daughter into her office. The room is filled with stuffed toys, puzzles, and lots of picture books. The woman brings her out after thirty minutes

and says, "She is very social and vocal. She does not need English as a second language (ESL) class at all." This is not surprising,

because she was only one when we

immigrated to Canada, and since then has been exposed to family daycares and preschool. What bothers me is that there is a discrepancy in the school system which evaluates immigrant children at an early age.

*As a result of facing disillusioning and distorted treatment, I have reached the conclusion that teachers should develop a real awareness of children's cultural experiences. Developing awareness takes a special kind of listening, one requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds.*

As a mother/teacher, I glean some insights from the home environment I create for my children, and from providing them with contemporary literacy skills. Being a parent of younger kids, the pressure of the English Language is felt much more strongly as the children begin to have more contacts outside of the home.

They are exposed to English everywhere, and have little support for their first language, Urdu. It saddens

*As a mother, I feel committed to providing a friendly and family-oriented environment in which everyone nurtures, and is nourished by, the values and traditions I carry within me. Maintaining our traditional values is important to me, and to the growth and development of my children. I believe education begins at home.*

me, for my own childhood was enriched by the privilege of knowing three languages. As parents, we sometimes feel threatened by the loss of our first language: finding our children conversing mostly in English and using their first language only occasionally.

Taking it to be a responsibility, I persistently talk to my children in Urdu. My husband

also uses our first language with the belief that the children are acquiring a passive knowledge, which will eventually be activated.

I strongly believe that reading in both languages is effective in fostering the development of literacy. With this belief, and in order to enhance the language development of my children, I read them stories that take me back to my childhood days when my father would gather his four kids around him. His enthusiasm could be seen in those moments: the way he expressed himself using different tones of voice and gestures, involving us all in his conversations.

My time with my children makes me realize that I have been blessed with outstanding mentors. They have illuminated so many aspects of human creativity for me with their intellectual power, expertise as educators, and qualities as human beings. In particular, they are my parents, the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, my uncle, Nasir-Ud-Din, and my two professors and gurus, Karen Meyer and Hillel Goelman. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my husband, who has always been my compelling force. My greatest challenge has been to live in these geographically diverse settings while maintaining a sense of integrity. I have spent fifteen years immersed in issues around child development, early childhood education curriculum, and culture as a social psychologist, early childhood educator, parent, immigrant, graduate student, researcher, and advocate for child and family rights. As I revisit the early childhood education books, journals and articles during graduate school, and discover deficient early childhood education curriculum approaches that emphasize only on the developmental aspect of children. Thus I find myself questioning the assumptions upon which the early childhood education approaches are based.

## **Exclusions and Awakenings: A Discussion**

Sitting in the university library, I look at the last two decades of research done in the field of Early Childhood Education. I sense and review this research from my place at the margins of established inquiry in my field. It is nothing that I can relate to. But now, looking at my field, I am struck by the linkage of my two focus areas that shift and merge in relation to one another, but are always at the forefront of my enquiry. The two focus areas are the childcare teachers, and multicultural education. I read the research surrounding my focus area to find out *what has been excluded from the early childhood education texts and therefore could cause detrimental effects for children's growth and learning.*

### **Education of childcare teachers:**

As I read intensively and extensively, I seriously question the current conceptualizations of child-development courses in early childhood education training programs that have attempted to provide a universal basis for professional practice with children without specific reference to ethnicity or culture.

Confronted with culturally diverse children, educators have applied developmental theories based on norms derived from the study of white, western, middle-class children. Although curricular change is only one of the necessary reforms, my analysis is part of an effort to extend the discussion by highlighting the significance of development and cultural context for Canadian childcare centers. The early childhood education curriculum approach taught in child development courses is currently followed

as an identifiable approach by childcare centers in North America.<sup>11</sup> However, alternative perspectives exist with much evidence to support the view that human development can be understood only within the contexts of families, societies and cultures.<sup>12</sup> The focus of the cultural context approach to human development is to recognize the fact that considerable differences exist among individuals, especially among those from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. These differences range from those labeled common (e.g., eating and sleeping patterns) to those recognized as social (e.g., language). Bronfenbrenner's model elaborates an ecology of human development. His ecological proposition focuses on active involvement of a growing human being and the changing settings in which the developing person lives, as relations between these settings and the contexts in which these settings operate affect their developing.<sup>13</sup> Rogoff offers a slightly different way of contextualizing development.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education seeks to highlight practices drawn from developmental theory that are appropriate to the age of the child as well as being responsive to a child's individual needs. Developmentally appropriate practice is not a curriculum, rather, it is a framework, a philosophy, or an approach to work with young children. For more details on the philosophical and theoretical aspects of DAP see Z. Waqar.(2000). *Educational Insights*, 6(1)[<http://www.csci.edu.ubc.ca/publications/insights/online/v06n01/waqar.html>], 2000.

<sup>12</sup> For empirical evidence on families, societies and culture see Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1990, 1996; Cole, 1990, Marfo, 1993. I do relate to Bronfenbreener and Rogoff's evidence emphasizing the importance of cultural contexts and family for children's growth and development but these scholars also claim that study of culture, environment, what people are living there, what are they doing and the activities within their context influences human development and learning that continues to receive scant attention within developmental psychology.

<sup>13</sup> Bronfenbrenner (1979) model, the ecology of human development, is well known. He criticizes mainstream research for its focus on characteristics of individuals almost to the exclusion of the properties of the social and cultural contexts in which the individuals are found.

<sup>14</sup> Rogoff (1990) views development as having universal as well as local characteristics. For instance, in a community based on household food production, children's development is thought to be based not on independent functioning, but on their effective participation in tasks in which they have become proficient so as to avoid wastage of materials. Development is multidimensional; it does not follow a unidimensional course, and there is no one specific goal.

Similarly, the current methods of assessment used by researchers in child development texts include instruments developed for white, middle-class, North American children. Researchers assumed the universality of Western norms and other cultures' practices represented a deviation. In 1990, Bernhard criticized the assessment category for not considering contextual factors. She said that Gesell who conducted studies at the Yale Clinic in the 1920's report, did not altogether exclude children from foreign language homes but drew his subjects mainly from American homes. A few years later, she cites and affirms this proposition by again criticizing Gesell's tests for looking at deviations from mainstream norms in terms of individual differences.<sup>15</sup>

Such measurement tools should in addition consider each person's cultural characteristics which have developed within the cultural-contextual paradigm that has been overlooked.

While doing this literature research I find that most standard assessment tools are conceived and interpreted from the perspectives of a mainstream culture that makes judgements about children whose cultural knowledge may differ markedly from the children of the dominant western culture. I feel that the intellectual strengths of children from different cultures are being overlooked by the tests.<sup>16</sup> It seems apparent that the

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<sup>15</sup> The reliability and validity of Gesell's 1928 tests are problematic as they are based on a concept of developmental age. Bernhard states that the growth gradient charts and Gesell School Readiness Test are widely used in child development texts and in normative material guiding the interpretation of well-known psychological tests. The underlying assumptions and Intelligence tests (Gesell's approach) for diverse student populations have been (Bernhard, 1995) critiqued. It is reported by Meisels (1989), that although the Gesell School Readiness Tests lack validity and reliability and is based on a concept of developmental age for which there is no available evidence, it continues to be widely used as a measure of kindergarten readiness.

<sup>16</sup> Bloch (1992), in her longitudinal, ethnographic study of children making a transition into public schools examines the relationship among culture, development and education and criticizes the standard assessment tools that are conceived and interpreted from the perspectives of mainstream culture or interpreted as response errors. In her conclusive remarks, Bloch emphasizes the significance of home-school relationships, children of diverse cultures and class backgrounds to be considered in children's education.

approaches in early childhood education does not place a high priority on the diverse cultures and contexts that are regularly faced.<sup>17</sup> Early childhood approaches fail to acknowledge and recognize children's different rearing patterns, timing of growth, different experiences and different learning styles. There could be issues occurring in the daycares and with teachers; such as, how to handle a child in a difficult situation and/or how much choice-making children require.

Canadian society represents diverse cultures and races. Such diversity among children makes it necessary for all professionals in the field to gain the widest possible understanding of the differences and common threads among cultures. It is imperative to appreciate the nuances of meaning that cultures assign to children's patterns of behavior. I believe that teachers of young children can be a positive force in facilitating the family's adaptation process, and in helping them to make a smooth transition. When teachers are prepared to teach each child based only on North American rearing patterns and education, their degree of preparation becomes a critical issue in settings where contemporary childcare centers have children from different cultural backgrounds. The focus of my study is on teachers working with children between the ages of three and five within the domain of early childhood education.

Many researchers in Canada have been critical of teacher education programs. The Canadian Child Care Federation issued a draft report on post-secondary education in 1991 and identified cultural diversity as a key aspect of quality training. In the field of

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<sup>17</sup> Janice Jipson (1991), in her research with thirty teachers, applied classroom journals and personal narratives to explore the implications of developmentally and culturally appropriate practices for early childhood education. Many of the teachers in Jipson's study expressed that developmentally appropriate practice guidelines did not adequately respond to the diverse cultures and contexts that they regularly faced.



early childhood education there are discussions on increased diversity content in programs, but there is also reported evidence that in Canada, child development courses in early childhood education teacher training diploma programs do not address these diversity issues, and that teachers often feel at a loss to properly deal with the present diverse educational situations in which they find themselves. Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud, and Lange (1997) conducted a three-year study, involving families, early childhood graduates and faculty at early childhood education professional training programs in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec: the provinces of major immigrant influx. They randomly selected seventy seven childcare centers and interviewed seventy seven supervisors and one hundred and ninety nine graduates, inquiring whether early childhood education courses incorporate areas such as diversity issues and teachers' preparedness to work with children from diverse cultures. The results of the study show that the early childhood education courses do not include or address diversity issues. The graduates in early childhood education indicate that they did not feel prepared to work with diverse populations upon graduation. This conclusion is in accord with that of Goddard (1995), who surveyed four hundred and fifty teachers in Western Canada and found that they were unprepared to work with diverse student populations.

In early childhood education, a thorough understanding of child development and the methods appropriate for teaching young children are essential professional qualifications. The role of early childhood educators in planning classroom activities and implementing these daily schedules affirms the centrality of the teacher in these processes. As an early childhood educator, I think teachers of young children are the key early childhood education practitioners who make decisions, and develop and implement plans based on

child development knowledge within the context of the classroom. Teachers not only develop and implement early childhood education programs, but also interact directly with the culturally diverse children in their classrooms. Teachers' personal knowledge and experience are particularly important to my discussion because they reflect the cultural perspectives, values, and personal philosophies they bring to the classroom.

As my study is concerned implicitly with the teachers' beliefs about the field of early childhood education and their relation to practice, the notion of "conception" is used to identify and isolate these beliefs. Thus, "conception" will refer to the relationship between teachers' thinking with respect to early childhood curriculum approaches, and classroom behaviors within the context of classroom practice. The focal question is: *Why look into beliefs?*

Constructivist thought on teachers' cognition suggests that teachers are knowing beings and that their knowledge influences their actions. These formulation theories or theoretical orientations consist of sets and systems of individual beliefs. Knowledge, then, forms a belief system, which directs perceptions and behaviors. Richardson (1994) claims that teachers' beliefs are formed by three categories of experience: personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge beginning at different stages of the individual's educational career.<sup>18</sup>

Personal experience, according to Richardson includes aspects of life that go into the

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<sup>18</sup> In Sikula's Handbook of "Research on Teacher Education" edited in 1994, Virginia Richardson provides a detailed account of factors that contribute to the formulation of belief's and research studies on teacher's beliefs and practices. Such factors include personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction and experience with formal knowledge beginning at different stages of the individual's educational career.

formation of world view, intellectual disposition, beliefs about self in relation to others, and understandings of the relationship to society. Besides these aspects, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, religious upbringing, and life decisions are all beliefs and conceptions that in turn affect teachers' pedagogical practices.

Research on teacher education examines the relationship between personal experience and how one approaches teaching. These are generally case studies of individual teachers.<sup>19</sup> Another aspect influencing the development of beliefs and knowledge is teachers' seminal work. Lortie (1975) suggests that preservice teachers have a set of beliefs about the nature of teaching based on their own experiences as students. My intention is to explore teachers' thinking in combination with their real teaching practice to find if they are having difficulty in applying early childhood education approach to culturally diverse children. Two relevant case studies by Anning (1988) and Britzman (1991) examine beliefs acquired from such experiences and how these beliefs affect teachers' conceptions of their role as teacher. Britzman claims that teachers' prior conceptions profoundly affected the student-teachers' classroom behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Richardson (1997) explains that experience is the formal knowledge which officially begins when students enter kindergarten, but can often begin even before they experience formal knowledge in their school subjects. Studies of the origins of teachers' beliefs or

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<sup>19</sup> Clandinin and Connelly in 1991 wrote a case study working with an elementary school principal, to understand his personal practical knowledge and actions as a principal. An important image in this principal's narrative was that of community, which developed from his experiences of growing up in a tightly knit community and affected his approach to the involvement of community in his school.

<sup>20</sup> In 1991, Britzman's case study of two student teachers indicated that they held powerful conceptions of the role of teachers, both positive and negative, gained from observing teaching models. Britzman suggested that these strong images of teachers about the nature of teaching profoundly influence the student teachers' classroom behaviors.

conceptions indicate that many different life experiences contribute to the formulation of beliefs about teaching and learning. The research conducted in the field of teacher education shows that teachers' experience and their knowledge and beliefs play a strong role in shaping what students learn and how they learn it.

This research catches my eye and convinces me to accept that teachers' beliefs, perspectives and values all strongly influence their teaching philosophy and behavior, which in turn influences the views, conceptions and behaviors of young children. It brings to mind some motherly images. I, being born and raised in one culture and adapting to another as an immigrant, would suggest that teachers think about their own culture in an effort to develop cultural awareness about themselves and the cultures of their students.

Research on teachers' beliefs indicate inconsistencies between teachers' thought processes and practices. There are few studies conducted on teachers' beliefs in the field of early childhood education. Research studies on teachers' thought processes in early childhood education have either focused on quality in childcare or investigated developmentally appropriate practices. For example, in an effort to understand how developmentally appropriate practice as an early childhood education approach is perceived and interpreted by teachers, some researchers have studied teacher thinking about developmentally appropriate practice implementation (e.g. Stipek, Daniels, Galluzzo & Milburn, 1992; Cassidy, Buell, Pugh Hoese & Russel, 1993) while others have focused on understanding teachers' characteristics and their practices regarding developmentally appropriate practice guidelines for instruction (Bryant, Clifford & Peisner., 1991; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley & Fleege., 1993; Buchanan, Burts.

Bidner, White & Charlesworth, 1998). These studies have focused only on children from poverty-stricken homes or on children with disabilities (Stipek et al., 1995). Cultures of diverse children are important variables that have been neglected in the field of child development theory and research.

The methods employed in these studies are diverse. Some have used paper and pencil instruments to elicit teachers' ideas and beliefs, for example, Charlesworth et al., (1993) devised a Likert scale based on developmentally appropriate practice guidelines (Bredekamp, 1987) literature to identify teacher characteristics, classroom characteristics and their practice. Bryant et al., and Buchanan et al.; have used questionnaires combined with observation. Some researchers have used unstructured approaches such as open-ended interviews and observation. Others have employed multiple methods to gain access to teachers' thought processes and to understand how beliefs and actions might be related.

Teachers' beliefs are essential because we need to know from their perspective what is important and what is not. Research shows that early childhood education graduates bring with them individual beliefs and conceptions, and apply their knowledge with widely varying results (Bernhard, 1995; Bryant et al., 1991; Buchanan et al., 1998).

Another controversial issue, that of teachers' voices representing their conceptions on their classroom practice, has not been addressed in mainstream early childhood education arenas. It would be helpful to explore childcare workers' understandings of forces within their lives, and connect them to their teaching practices. These teachers should be encouraged to reflect on factors that may constrain their lives in a culturally diverse childcare center.

## **Multicultural Education:**

In recent years, the field of multicultural education in Canada has undergone significant transformation and redefinition from pressure to respond to a dynamic social milieu. Despite the fact that research and theorizing in this area originates from American conceptions of multicultural education, Canada remains one of the few nations in the world that has entrenched multicultural ideals into national government policy.<sup>21</sup> Canadian history also differs in significant ways from that of our American neighbor due to particular immigration patterns and policies, and social and educational institutions.

There are inarguable differences in theoretical literature for the term “multicultural education.” I have found that multicultural education and anti-racism education are often addressed interchangeably. Likewise, there has been a recent shift in education, and particularly in the field of early childhood education, to using the term “cultural diversity” for multiculturalism or multicultural perspective. While the controversy continues on how multicultural education should be defined, there is a high level of consensus about its aims and goals. The agreement regarding multicultural education’s aims and goals emerges from Gay’s (1994) synthesis<sup>22</sup> that ranges in scope from the narrow to the global, from curricular to contextual, from ethnic-specific to socially inclusive, and from socially neutral to politically prescriptive.

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<sup>21</sup> There are inarguable differences in theoretical literature for the term multicultural education. I have found that multicultural education and anti-racism education are often addressed interchangeably. For further details on “Multicultural Education in Canada,” see Moodley. In J. A. Banks & C.A. McGee Banks (Eds.), “Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education.” New York: Macmillan, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Gay’s synthesis (1994) talks about diversity-centered and historically based curriculum, promoting educational reforms, diversity-directed instruction, context-dependent curricula and comprehensive multicultural education to permeate all contexts.

Hidalgo, Cha'vez-Cha'vez and Ramage (1995) label Gay's synthesis as a politicized social-justice version of multicultural education. They argue that Gay indirectly alludes to the social and political dimensions of the educational reform caused by multicultural education. Although many writers have attempted to explain what multicultural education is, I agree with Nieto's (1992) definition which more directly addresses the contextual issues. Nieto's definition explicates the social equity and anti-racist mandates of multicultural education because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

Currently, there is strong debate surrounding the intention and usefulness of multicultural education, and the idea of multiculturalism itself. A child's behavior, performance, and experiences within the context of the classroom and school environment as a whole, are shaped as much by the child's own personal attributes as they are by a complex combination of contextual variables. Many scholars have studied how children understand culture and seem to agree that by the age of three or four, young children can readily see differences and begin to acquire negative assumptions and stereotypes relating to racial, ethnic, gender, and class distinctions. Therefore, multicultural education is a process that aims to help children from diverse cultural, ethnic, gender and social class groups attain equal educational opportunities and to develop positive cross-cultural attitudes, perceptions and behaviors.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Nieto (1992) defined multicultural education and asserts that teaching and learning must challenge racism and other forms of social domination and intolerance and focus on knowledge, reflection and action as the basis for social change.

<sup>24</sup> Scholars like Banks & Banks (1989); Hirschfield (1993); Gelman, (1990) and Ramsey, (1987) researched and agreed that children begin to understand culture at the age three or four and assimilate negative or positive assumptions relating to different ethnic groups based on their experiences.

Chud and Fahlman (1985) emphasize a direct response to a sociopolitical environment that encourages recognition, respect, and full participation of the various cultures and linguistic groups that comprise Canadian society in multicultural education. Cultural diversity in education is not only required for classrooms that are culturally and linguistically diverse, but also for classrooms comprised of children from only one cultural background.

A controversial issue surrounding the multicultural orientation of education is whether to add a single area to a program or have it infused as a core theme. I consider multicultural education not as something that can simply be added to a curriculum with materials from different cultures and/or the celebrating of special cultural occasions of a few ethnic minorities. Rather, it requires teachers' personal acceptance of cultural diversity being reflected in all aspects of education. Though it is difficult to transform early childhood education programs or teacher-training courses overnight, I believe that changes can take place if teachers do not show resistance or erect barriers to the process. Therefore, we must concentrate most of our energy on our daily classroom activities. In Canada, there is currently insufficient research conducted in the field of early childhood education investigating multicultural perspectives. In my view, teachers who follow only sporadic or isolated cross-cultural contact will be less successful in fostering in children a tolerance and understanding of other cultures. Results from two studies on multicultural education suggest that an activity-based, interactive approach is an effective method for enhancing positive cross-cultural learning, and that intervention that is supportive of children's differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds can positively affect self-



concept.<sup>25</sup> These results support teachers who strive to enhance the cross-cultural experiences of their students through the emphasis of commonality and the celebration of diversity

The Canadian population is considered a mosaic rather than a homogenized melting pot. While all share some common experiences, the many diverse groups that make up this country maintain distinctive cultural values, traditions and experiences. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of new immigrants in recent years. The status of an immigrant's application is based on level of education, occupational skills, local demands and personal adaptability.<sup>26</sup> While my intention is to focus on first-generation immigrants, immigration continues to infuse ethnic communities with new members who may reinforce and revive their cultural traditions. The rapid increase in immigration has resulted in an increased number of second-generation immigrant children whose first language is other than that of the school. Many immigrant families place their children in childcare facilities in order to stabilize their family's economic status. This reality gives the childcare teacher the unique opportunity to act as a buffer during this transitional phase; interacting with children from different cultures who attend these childcare centers.

There is evidence that early childhood education courses in Canadian teacher-training programs do not emphasize the cultural perspective, and so teachers are left unprepared to meet the diverse needs of children from different cultures. Therefore, I

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<sup>25</sup> Two research projects on multicultural programs conducted in Ontario, 1981 & British Columbia, 1981.

<sup>26</sup> According to the Annual Report to Parliament, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1993, 1994, 1995), every 4-5 years over a million fresh immigrants arrive in Canada. Immigrants are given residential status by the Canadian-selected policy known as the Point System (Statistics Canada, Immigration Statistics, 1991).

would like to know *what childcare teachers think when faced with culturally diverse children. How do they apply early childhood education approach in a classroom that contain children from different cultures? Do they face tensions and issues?* If so, the content in multicultural education becomes a critical issue for teachers, as each teacher has a cultural identity that includes his/her national origin, family, religion, gender, educational background, geographical region, first language, age, socioeconomic level and job experiences, skills, teaching situations, and life experiences.

Those teachers who are aware of cultural effects may be ready and able to redesign and transform their programs to include materials and activities that reflect diverse cultures. Conversely, some teachers may not be ready, or may be unsure of how multicultural education relates to them personally and professionally. These teachers fail to appreciate the similarities and differences between their understanding of the world and the children they teach. This situation requires attention to issues of personal engagement and curricular application.

The above axiom applies both to teachers from the cultural mainstream and to teachers from other cultures. A multicultural learning environment involves the teacher modelling positive attitudes and actions towards children from diverse minorities. Moreover, teachers' values and perspectives also mediate and interact with what they teach. The content that teachers wish to impart comes not only from their knowledge of what children are capable of knowing at a particular level, but also from what they believe is important for children to know. Considering its unique locus in culturally diverse classrooms, many scholars advocate that teachers should make a self-conscious

and critical exploration of their own cultural identities and their culture's historical, sociocultural and political origins.<sup>27</sup> This reflection helps to develop cultural awareness about themselves and their students' cultures, and makes them better able to critically examine how their cultural realities may influence what they do, why they do what they do, and who are they doing it for.

The intensive and extensive discussion on the perspectives of early childhood education curricular guidelines, childcare teachers, and multicultural education has revealed that there is considerable debate in the early childhood education field about the nature, purpose and meaning of child development. One of the central issues awakened by this debate and call to action is the exploration of the relationship between approaches in early childhood education and the teaching of children from different cultures. For that reason, my project has been greatly influenced by Bourdieu's (1999) critical theory.<sup>28</sup> He describes how different forms of cultural capital and social capital help maintain economic privilege, even if these norms of capital were not themselves strictly related to economy.

My need is to challenge perceived personal limitations (*difficulties or connections in practice and theories*), and the issues and concerns reflected in the literature of early

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<sup>27</sup> Scholars who advocate teachers' self-cultural awareness are Hauser (1990), Spindler & Spindler (1989). They explored and internalized the nature of teachers' personal interpretation of American culture and the place minority cultures occupy within it. Their cultural analysis were not designed to change teachers or students but to help understand cultural differences and judgements made on the basis of their cultural values.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Bourdieu argues that youngsters should follow the legacy of cultural capital through such tangibles as values, tastes, and behaviors, and through cultural identities such as language and ethnicity; and secondly, social capital that is made up of social obligations and networks which are convertible into economic capital, as it determines one's standing in the social structure. This would lead students to gain competence regardless of their class background. Bourdieu's work encompasses ethnographic research in Algeria. For Bourdieu's cultural capital see Neito S. *The Light in Their Eyes*, 1999. And for a description on Bourdieu's theory, see Derek, R. book '*The Work of Pierre Bourdieu*.' (Open University Press, 1991).

childhood education. I am seeking to learn *how teachers using early childhood education approaches describe their tensions and issues in their teaching practice? What are they thinking while teaching children from other cultures?*

I wish to learn directly from the childcare teachers of their challenges working with culturally diverse children. *How do teachers talk about their personal experiences? I wonder what the writers and researchers are doing in this area. My heart asks me about the environment in which child and teacher actions take place and what teachers think while working with children.* I think Bernhard and New would agree with the importance of learning about teachers' experiences while working with culturally diverse children. *Where is the new research?* I am unable to find any recent research in my area. I have to leave, the library because the answers to my heart's questions cannot be found there.

**Searching for the unknown**

*Living in different cultures  
and working with young children,*

*not only, I faced conflict in theory and practice  
when others could not understand*

*my convictions on this island  
of child development.*

*School director, parents and colleagues  
questioned, why play in the classrooms,  
just learn, learn and learn.*

*I found myself surfing along these barriers  
back home and in Canada.*

*Teachers of young children are yet to know  
the needs of children*

*from different backgrounds  
and share and give and understand all that I voice.*

*How I yearn to know  
what early childhood teachers*

*may tell – their stories, their struggles, their challenges  
working in a culturally diverse childcare center.*

a poem by Zoobi Waqar

## LOOKING AT SURREY WITH THE MIND'S EYE

### **Surrey community and its environment/lifestyle**

*It is spring of 2000 and I am in Edmonton to present my paper at the conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. A friend of mine who has come from New York to attend the same conference has joined me to dine. Later, we set out for a walk on the side-lanes of the university under a canopy of pink blossom trees, in the long days of May. As we walk, discussing my project, she asks me:*

**Orokosh:** Where is such a culturally diverse center that will sustain you for such a long time?

**Zoobi** *(I respond): Since December of 1999, I've been searching appropriate day-care centers that might accept my research and my presence. It's not only an expedition but the site search itself has become a project! Out of eleven daycare centers that I contacted by telephone, all welcomed me to visit. Presenting my physical presence to these children centers has caused me frustration and annoyance because only a few of the center administrators who gave me permission to conduct my research allowed me to stay in their childcare facility for a month. They also said, "You're only to do observations of the children. You're not to ask any questions of the teachers. And, you'll only be allowed to stay in one classroom."*

The facility which finally shows interest in my research and accepts my request to work on my project for approximately six months, is a children center. The center is known to me, for a few years earlier, I had worked there after landing in Canada and

settling in Surrey. I worked in the center with children of different age groups, and leaving that angelic paradise after just a year was a very trying experience for me.

My reason for leaving the daycare was my admission into the University of British Columbia to study what is missing in early childhood education guidelines. My experience as an early childhood educator in Pakistan, England and now in Canada has been that children all over the world require adults to fulfill their needs to be loved and cared for. It is an instinctive urge that compels me to work with passion and an observing eye when dealing with my community – the community of young ones, their parents and their teachers.

*To understand the linkages between people's lives, the place they live, and their environment, I would like to share an opportunity to develop a multilayered sense of a place as something co-created by the diverse people who have lived and still exist there. Therefore, to view Surrey, I invite you to enter a moment in time —a time I have cherished —a time of belonging —a time to share the experience.*

*Come, join me.*

*Surrey has become a sprawling suburban community - the largest in British Columbia in terms of land area, stretching from the banks of the Fraser River in the north to Boundary Bay and the United States border to the south. This puts city center*

*businesses within easy access of local, national and world markets. Surrey is close to all major cities in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. It is bound by Delta in the west and Langley in the east, and is the easternmost municipality in Greater Vancouver. In 1990, the Skytrain rapid transit line installed four of its stations in Surrey, bringing Vancouver within thirty- minutes of the Whalley.*

*Surrey is one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada. British Columbia's second largest city in population (304,477), Surrey has a land area of 301.76 square km. It has been divided into six distinct towns or communities. Each of these communities — **Whalley, Guildford, Newton, Fleetwood, Cloverdale and South Surrey**— has its own unique character. Because of its fast-growing population, every year new schools are planned and built. Having more than four hundred parks encompassing over 3,000 acres, mostly in its natural state, Surrey is known as a city of parks. With a commercial core of high and low density residential development, each community has a self-contained town center where people can live, work and play. Viewing the proportion of people in the work force, all those working in labour, agriculture and other industries have at least a secondary education. People who have completed a university education are usually employed in service industries.*

*Surrey includes communities representing numerous ethnic groups from all over the world that have immigrated to Canada at various times. These visible minorities (other than Aboriginal persons) are non-Caucasian. One can observe skin colors of dark brown to a blend of fair and tan. People's hair and head dresses are different, and there is great variety in clothing styles. Amongst the minorities are South Asian, Arabian,*



*African, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Latin American, and Southeast Asian populations. The primary reason to live in Surrey is to join an established and familiar community. It also helps that the cost of living in Surrey is low compared to other cities in the Lower Mainland.*

### **Commuting to Guildford**

*With Surrey now familiar, I plan and organize my visit to the children center. The morning is quiet on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000, and my children are still in bed. I am wearing my English hat and a floral skirt. As I step out of my family residence, I recall:*

*One summer morning, as I walked down the Shalimar gardens*

*in a floral shalwar Kameez,*

*I imagined myself in a foreign land*

*with women walking past me in like apparel.*

*It was a sight of pleasure & I wished it would happen*

*wherever I went.*

*I take a bus headed to the Broadway Skytrain station. From there, I sit on the train and contemplate, with clear conceptions, the Guildford communities in my mind.*

**It is Guildford town where richly-diverse populations**

**form the neighboring community of the “children center.”**

**The children center rents and runs in the basement of a church**

**located on the avenue that is on a main road**

**extending from Fleetwood town,**

**down to the North Delta.**

Near the childcare campus are many community parks  
providing shady places for people of various cultures  
to socialize.

The train heightens its speed  
crossing the Fraser River bridge.

Occasionally, while waiting inside the Skytrain due to its mechanical  
procrastination, I think of strange things.

And I wonder during the waiting period whether  
it is my imagination, or if every other neighbor at that time  
is having analogous thoughts.

I hear the faded sound of a bell followed by  
the recorded voice of a lady calling  
*"The next station is Surrey Central."*

I step out and again take a bus and while looking outside the window

I see  
flower beds hanging from several apartment balconies;

Singing, moving, glancing vibrantly,  
growing sporadically in their beds;  
Looking at me with silent gestures  
as if welcoming me back.

When I step down from it I find myself  
in a busy avenue with traffic.

I cross the main road

**and walk along the Church side on 142nd street.**

**I see condominiums where seniors reside**

**and further down are huge three-level houses.**

**I can determine executive houses on the other side of the lane.**

**In these different kinds of dwellings,**

**people from different cultures live in basements or apartments.**

**Houses have frames of wood painted in various colours**

**with asbestos roofs; they are arranged**

**in symmetrically square front yards**

**edged by thin hedgerows with a broad driveway on one side.**

**A double outline of flowers edges the porches**

**in the spring and ever:**

**A row of pots on the porch or hanging**

**flower baskets and marigolds set in the ground**

**across the entire length of the front.**

**My eyes view backyards**

**with evenly or unevenly shaped**

**gardens with vegetable growth and**

**an occasional camper van or boat.**

**Children from the neighbourhood**

**walk to four elementary schools**

**within the vicinity.**

**Many children under six attend the daycare.**

**Guildford, having a culturally diverse working-class community  
whose older generation work either in farms,  
or in factories.**

**Others look elsewhere for jobs,  
which ensures they might rise  
above their parents' position  
in the technical, business or service worlds.**

**Guildford immigrants have high education,  
but they believe persistence in furthering their educational  
qualifications could make a difference  
for their children and for them.**

**They have high aspirations for their young ones.**

**Being an immigrant, a parent  
and an early childhood educator,  
my interpretations about educating children  
is the promise of good living and getting ahead,  
and gaining a new and prosperous life in the future.**

### **The Children Center**

*I finally arrive at the Church where the children center is located. The weather is pleasant as the sun shines brightly. It has taken me an hour and forty-five minutes to reach my place of interest. It is 10 a.m. when I knock on the entrance door. Somebody opens the door for me and I walk right into the daycare through one of three large front*

*doors, which look about twice my height. I note the configuration of the huge hall. It has a very large space that consists of two major sections. I discern one section of the area to be the west side of the hall that is set up in a noticeable manner.*

**Westside hall 1:**

**There is a cubby corner with children's belongings  
and teachers' shelves for their possessions  
all stay in the southwest-bound end;  
in the east, there is a book corner with an easy chair  
and floor cushions.**

**In the Northeast corner is a L-shaped shelf which contains puzzles, Lego pieces,  
threading cards, finger puppets, etc,  
to divide this manipulative corner and the quiet corner (books area)  
on the southwest is an activity corner displaying the theme of the month,  
with shelves bearing art materials, containers and etc, etc.**

**In the west of the hall is a beautiful dramatic corner,  
a kitchen, dishwasher, laundry machine and a doll house  
arranged in a small compact house which mimics real life.**

**On the top of the children's cubbies is a bulletin board with teachers' licenses  
and information for parents.**

**The west wall is lined from north to south with two garbage bins.**

*It is wonderful seeing how different the center looks in its interior décor from my  
past experience in this well-equipped children center. There is more furniture, more  
resource materials, and more children from diverse cultures. I move to the other section*

*of the hall, segregated by moveable boards. This section is arranged in a slightly different pattern. I wonder why. Maybe it is because of the varied age groups of the children, or because the children in this side of the hall stay for a longer duration than the children on the western side. I observe fifteen children sitting in a semi-circle facing their class teacher. Other childcare teachers are helping the children to sit and take turns. I see children look around and ask their teacher about my presence. She completes the circle activity and then introduces me as a visitor. I am more than delighted, but soon depart, recording notes on the environment of the eastside hall in my mind.*

**Eastside hall 2:**

**The cubby corner is on the left of the entrance door  
and above these are teachers' early childhood education certificates, their licenses**

**and lots of information for parents.**

**I observe a bookshelf with different sizes and varieties of books,  
cushions and a puppet theatre nearby;  
three shelves are arranged in a rectangular fashion that surround  
a rectangular table with eight chairs to make an activity corner  
with a variety of materials for children to use.**

**To the east of the activity zone, my eyes access this wonderland for children.**

**I note how much planning it must have required  
from its teacher-architects;  
you find a kitchen, laundry, living room  
and a bedroom exhibiting furniture and materials;  
dolls and clothing, all in one area;**

**then there is what I call an artist's theatre  
divided by two shelves bearing manipulatives.**

**On the border crossing is a garbage tin  
standing about two feet high,  
and another garbage bin is seen in the activity corner.**

**On the left, the visitor discovers teacher resource shelves  
and a place for staff belongings.**

**Next to the entrance, a table contains a notebook for parents  
to sign in when bringing their child to the daycare and  
sign out when receiving their offspring.**

**A telephone and a diary book are installed near the entrance  
in which incoming calls are recorded by and for the staff to read and act on.**

**I find an outdoor play area secured by a yard fence;  
having monkey-bars, swings, slides, bikes and pull carts  
and maybe more.**

*I move into the kitchen zone next to the entrance of the daycare that is shared with the church. It is used from 6:30 a.m. till 6:00 p.m. The kitchen is fully equipped with electrical gadgets, cooking utensils, cutlery, dining linen, napkins, and dishes. Teachers prefer to stay in the kitchen when the children nap. Near the cooking range, another door leads into a corridor. This long slender gully heads to different locations, including the washrooms, director's office, nap rooms and the church.*

*In the back of the big hall are three independent rooms; two are used as nap rooms. They have small mattresses covered with linen, pillows and blankets. The*

*children's parents provide all the beddings. The last room has been arranged to conduct circle time activities.*

*My interest in the daycare grows deeper when its director and staff respond positively to my presence and research project. It makes me recall the desperate efforts I made in searching for a culturally diverse daycare center. I had spent almost two months searching for an appropriate facility that would accommodate me and my study. As the center director gives me a warm welcome and accepts my request to pursue my research at her childcare facility, I feel overwhelmed.*

*At twelve noon I have a brief talk with the staff members after the children have gone for their nap. They ask about the nature of my study and how long it will be. As I am fully prepared to talk about the study, I respond to their queries and say that I will be doing a pilot study with the preschool teacher, and then after four months, will be back on the childcare premises to conduct my research.*

*This center is a licensed child-care facility like many others, it has children from diverse cultural backgrounds: African, Chinese, Fijian, Filipino, Japanese, South Asian, Vietnamese and Latin American. The majority of these children's parents are first-generation immigrants. This is another primary and compelling factor in my choice of the center. The daycare provides a stimulating and positive (growth) environment for children. It maintains a policy according to the guidelines of early childhood education curriculum in North America, and encourages constant communication between teachers and parents. The registration forms of the center require information about the child, her/his parents, siblings and any other adults in the family. Parents have to fill in the child's immunization history and her/his vaccination record. Every month, a newsletter is*



*sent to the parents. It contains excerpts on classroom themes, field trips and other related information on child development.*

*The daycare has a variety of programs such as Preschool, Daycare, Special Needs and Out-of-School care. In addition, transportation to and from school is also available. Most of the staff has early childhood education diploma and provide learning experiences to enhance each child's motor, social, cognitive, intellectual and emotional skills.*

*A total of fifty-six children are registered in the different programs at this center. Out of twenty-four children in daycare program, eighteen are full-time students attending all five days in a week and six children are part-time. Two teachers are always in a class of ten to fifteen children. Many times there will be three staff members when part-time students are attending the daycare program. Children's age ranges from two-and-a-half to six years in the daycare.*

*After arranging my schedule with theirs, I provide the teachers with the agenda that will begin in the months ahead. I leave the daycare on that first day with a deeper understanding of its context and the living beings, children and teachers included, who appear to be from a variety of cultures, and who will help my anxious mind to understand them and their work.*

**WHO DOES THE TEACHING AND CARING?  
IN THEIR OWN WORDS: THE LIVES AND CONCERNS OF  
CHILDCARE TEACHERS**

*Most call us child minder/s? Some call us caretakers!*

*I am a licensed childcare teacher;*

*How am I/ or we, to exist?*

*Should I/or we be a woman of patience,*

*a role model or have a heart that gives*

*for-gives, shows kindness, and sensitizes other-ness?*

*Four months later:*

*Finally the big day dawns. It is the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 2000. Monday morning at 7:00 – my time to enter the children center has come. I will never forget hopping out of bed early, as if a teenager preparing excitedly for a fieldtrip. Everything that day appears new and unique to me.*

In this chapter, reimagine the portraits of the childcare teachers as I describe them. I now present each teacher's life saga in her own voice, and her own conceptions of the North American ECE approach and purposes that she has come to realize through her pedagogical practice. Central patterns that characterize each teacher's understanding of early childhood approaches become apparent and are analogous across them. By listening to the childcare teachers' conceptions on their training courses and curriculum approach and documenting their voices, we can learn something and improve, if we simply listen attentively to the stories they tell us about their understandings.

My curiosity to present their self-narrated portraits arises from the desire to give these childcare teachers the space to talk about their issues. In the left column of the document, the individual voices of the teachers speak to the audience about their concerns. My field notes relating to their concerns are represented on the right. Although each teacher discusses the three themes presented in this chapter (**acquired ECE knowledge** {*knowledge of ECE content gained through diploma program*}, **the ECE-based daily schedule** {*the daily activity plan based on ECE approach*}, and **acquired ECE knowledge: insufficient knowledge** {*ECE courses, lack the important factors*}), each makes profoundly individual statements. My goal is to expand the understanding of human development by using teachers' voices, usually left out in the construction of theory, in an effort to call attention to their omission.

## From Tea Terraces to Pumpkin Patches

*Natasha:*

*"I worked at several part-time jobs after school and on weekends. In the mornings I worked in restaurants, then later at Macdonald's from 5 p.m. till 12 midnight. I wanted to do what I could to abate the pain of my tuition fees and our living expenses."*

My life prior to coming to Canada was filled with great comfort and contentment. I was like a bird living in a nest with my family in a cozy, fine house amidst green trees. The eldest child in the family, I was born in 1965, Bandarawela city in Sri-Lanka. At that time, my parents lived on a Tea-Estate. I experienced going to a Montessori school and also went to kindergarten. I vividly remember joining preschool at the age of three and my younger sister and my mother would drop me off. The good thing about Montessori at that time was real play utensils made out of Chinaware. In ECE today, everything is made out of plastic.

When I turned six I was diagnosed with asthma, so I was sent to Columbia, a city located at a higher altitude. It was there that I started elementary schooling in a private Christian missionary school for girls. It was a boarding school and the weather was cold, which made me feel better.

All of our subjects were taught in English. Classroom management was very straightforward and basic. When the teacher was talking, and if a student had a question, we were allowed to raise our hand and wait for the teacher's reply. A great deal of homework was given.

Besides excelling in my studies, I played tennis for my school, and after winning the Best Sportswoman Award, I was given the opportunity to play for my home country, Sri-Lanka. I had a great passion for sports at that time and had wanted to continue in Canada, but couldn't because of monetary constraints. It was the end of 1983. Civil war had broken out in Sri-Lanka and the president had to declare a state of emergency in the country. The civil war was between the Tamil forces and the Sinhalese people, and continues to this day. After I graduated from high school, my parents were desperate to send me and my sister to study abroad.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, 1984, my younger sister Roshi and I came to Vancouver, Canada. My maternal uncle sponsored us. The same year, in September, my sister joined grade ten and I joined Langara College in Vancouver. I completed two years of my undergrad from that institution. During that time, I worked at several part-time jobs after school and on weekends. Though my parents could provide some monetary support, I worked in a restaurant and later in Macdonald's from 5 p.m. till 12 midnight. I wanted to do what I could to abate the pain of my tuition fees and our living expenses. The other two years of my undergraduate program were completed at the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver, doing a major in psychology. I had enjoyed my studies, and the environment at the university.

In those days we lived on Alma Street near UBC, a very expensive area. That was the time when I quit working at Macdonald's due to course load. At the end of the term I went back to work, but in a Big Scoop restaurant, and made

some money. Still, that money couldn't balance my budget and I was forced to take fewer courses the following term.

In 1987, my sister graduated from high school and our parents came to Vancouver for her graduation ceremony. I have been extremely lucky in regards to my parents, who are wise and knowledgeable despite their limited formal schooling. In our childhood they guided us to books and learning. They provided their daughters with better opportunities and allowed us to make choices in our lives.

Later that same year, we went back to Sri-Lanka and got married to Sinhalese boys who were based in Vancouver. Now when I recall that time, I think I was crazy to do that. I returned and graduated from UBC in 1990. It was the cold winter of 1991 when my son Michael was born in the month of February.

My work as a mother matured with my subsequent affiliation with the family daycare of my sister-in-law. I was driven by a desire to "make a difference" and work with young children. In 1993, I began to work full-time in a family daycare with two children. Both were infants at that time and now they're in grade one and grade two, attending our out-of-school care program at the children center. I joined the present children center in 1995 and was assigned to open the center at 6:00 every morning. In that same year, I started my ECE diploma program registering in two courses at Langley Community College in the evenings. Through these courses I gained information on growth and development of children.

Now as a supervisor of the children center I have many jobs to perform each day. I open the daycare in the mornings, drop children off at different elementary schools, pick them up during the day, and afternoon, photocopy for our staff, write the newsletter every month, attend to incoming phone calls, plan and carry out the weekly activities, and deal with children, their parents and the teachers.

### **Teacher's Anxieties and Concerns on Early Childhood Education Curriculum**

Interview with Natasha

[Telling Silences]

#### **The ECE-based daily schedule**

Before the beginning of each month we have a staff meeting, after which we teachers also plan our monthly schedule. Our primary focus is always the children. As stated earlier, our daycare children are from different ethnic backgrounds and of different ages, and some are full-time or part-time students attending the center. Therefore, I plan my activities keeping in mind each child's needs, age and interests. Even though many of our children don't have English language skills yet, they talk to us in their first language, which I do not understand at all. I consider each child to have the ability to learn and the right to know. So I make sure that each child gets the most

#### **Pedagogical Practices**

**End notes:** *The following excerpts in this right column are taken from fieldnotes documented between Sept. 18<sup>th</sup> and October 6th, 2000, illustrating Natasha's pedagogical practices associated with her interview written on the left of this section.*

**My notes:** *As I gain entry into the center, I become a participant-observer, trying to develop a rapport with my first informer. Natasha is a licensed early childhood educator working from 6:00 a.m. till 3:30 p.m. She is introduced as a supervisor of the children center. I witness her performing jobs on several fronts that I will be able to talk about after a few days.*

**Fieldnotes:** September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000  
It is 8:30 a.m. and I see Natasha sitting with the youngest child of the daycare, assisting him in finishing his porridge and later helping him with his artwork. As I observe, I talk to myself — if I am to understand the adults in the daycare situation then the gateway is through

out of each activity. I somehow struggle to grasp the individual needs of the child at any given time in any given situation. I try to provide assistance because for me, children are the central force and around them every activity in the center rotates, enriching them in their development.

Every teacher plans for a week depending on the theme for that particular month. Themes are selected to coincide with the special events falling in that month and also keeping the four seasons in mind. Therefore, every daily activity represents a theme. All the stories, artwork, work sheets and field trips are planned according to the monthly theme.

As it's my week to plan and prepare, I selected the fall season. I'll be discussing with children whether they've come across any changes in the garden. Later, I'll take them out for a walk to collect fallen leaves and any other things that interest them. Bringing a lot of pictures to class, the children will make their 'autumn tree.' A film will be shown relating to our theme. Telling stories and asking questions. You'll find that children's work gets displayed on the bulletin boards for a week and after that the teachers distribute

knowing the children first.

**My notes:**

***Learning through the children's eyes***

*As I stand inside the daycare class  
with bustling life around me*

*I ask myself: do I really want to be in this  
children's paradise?*

*It is my conviction that I cannot win the  
children's attention unless I know them.*

*I spend time with children before I ask  
their teachers;*

*Wanted to get to the children's thinking:  
what they are puzzled about,  
what they do and do not know;*

*Listening to little ones when they play, and  
their conversations as they talk to their  
friends and relate to me who they were.*

***Fieldnotes: Sep. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000***

I observe the daily schedule for the month displayed on the bulletin board that everyone can access. Each teacher is assigned to plan, prepare and implement her weekly activities. Besides the daily schedule, I also find another typed paper that lists the non-teaching responsibilities of the childcare teachers. For example, every teacher is given jobs such as washing the used utensils each day, cleaning and washing the daycare toys every week, cleaning the nap room mattresses weekly, vacuuming, putting the stuff back into the storage every Wednesday and Friday and then taking it out again. Natasha takes out the daycare stuff on Monday and Thursday mornings. Another responsibility for her is dropping off and picking up the children from different school locations. Each job gets rotated amongst staff members, but how it is done and who is conducting it, is determined by the teachers themselves. Nearly every child completes his or her artwork in groups or individually. Suddenly, a bell rings and for a moment, I



them to the children to take home. Parents always appreciate it when their children show improvement in language and learning. I come to the daycare at 6:00 a.m. and sometimes kids like Stacey and Jardeep arrive before I do. Therefore I receive the children, and get their parents to sign in and write down anything they want the teachers to do. Mostly, the parents of these two kids just ask us to give them their breakfasts at 7:00 a.m. Actually my work day starts from there. Well, I feel from my heart for these children, because most of our daycare kids come from broken or split families and face such changes in early life. It is heartening for me as a teacher and a mother to work with them. I know I follow the daily schedule, but if I'm not prepared, I feel I'm running everywhere to bring in materials and am not able to be with the children. Therefore, my preparation is important. Sometimes it's hard for me to follow as I have to work on several jobs at a time. Or else I just leave it for the children to choose what they like to do. I always keep alternatives on my craft table. Although I do prepare, I also have scissors, papers, colored pencils or paints for them. I enjoy group activities with the children. For example,

face silence all over the daycare as children stand still like statues. When another teacher, Laura asks, "What are we supposed to do?" The children accurately respond, "Its clean up time." Everyone joins the activity session to clean the area except for two boys. The teacher finds some of the stuff lying beneath their table and asks, "Jashua, could you please help Sarjal clean the area?" Both children look, smile at each other and comply with the request.

Next, some children are sent to the washrooms in small groups while the others are kept busy singing nursery rhymes. Meanwhile, I help Natasha clean the tables with a disinfectant napkin and she lays table mats for each child. After the children have washed their hands, they and staff eat their fruit snack. Again, the children are sent to wash their hands before landing themselves in the book corner.

It is now circle time and Natasha brings her circle materials and children into one of the backrooms that is used for circle-time.

There are twelve children present at this time and teacher Laura, who has been assisting Natasha, has stayed in the daycare placing worksheets on the table and setting up other learning centers.

Natasha forms a circle and sings a few songs, hoping to get all the children involved before they settle down. A Punjabi-speaking child walks off behind a table and hides. At that point, Natasha calls firmly, "One....two...three!" A moment later the child comes out. Natasha says, "Well, if you pay attention to what I have to show and tell, then you will get more time to play outdoors."

At that point everyone sits quietly, listening to Natasha's voice. She asks, "How is everyone feeling today?"

Most children reply with, "Good." Another child responds, 'I am happy because my

you must have seen by now that in my circles children are allowed to communicate with me and discuss the topic at that time. I love telling stories that relate to them. Showing them that we are both different and similar and the need to accept that. Children like it and love you when you listen to their requests and provide them with new learning experiences. I search for a lot of new ideas to bring to the classroom. Besides all these assignments that I have to perform, I also coordinate field trips for the children. At the end of October we'll be taking the children to the Pumpkin Patch at Alder Acres Farms. I've already booked with their office in Langley.

♣

mom is taking me for hockey club to play after her work.'

Jardeep, a Punjabi-speaking child, relates in his language, "Meri mummy meno Macdonalds ley ke javay ge."

Natasha smiles and says to the children, "Good for you." She asks me what Jardeep has said. I explain.

***My notes:** It is interesting and surprising for me to note that the child Jardeep has been able to comprehend what the teacher has said, but replies in his first language.*

**Fieldnotes continue:**

The teacher takes attendance and next goes through the monthly calendar in which the children count the days in the week and the date for this day. Every day a different child gets the chance to put the date on the calendar and gets to select a sticker for herself or himself. During this time another teacher joins the circle activity. Natasha asks the children to choose from four books that she has brought to the session to be read. After storytelling, the children get to talk about the moral in the story. Then the staff and children sing the song, "If you are wearing something red, you can go." Laura, the other teacher, escorts the children to the learning tables in the daycare classroom where they work on coloring worksheets, drawing, or doing puzzles. As soon as the children finish their work they are signaled to go and get dressed for outdoor play. Hearing to the word 'outdoors', they run to do their part.

*All smiles  
heightened with energy and delight  
to go out and play;  
Children scream, swing, run and roll;  
They climb, catch, dig and fall;  
All play and play and play.  
Girls on the swings and slide,  
boys play cops and robbers*

*how they love to be in the sandpit;  
Till they get their jackets off  
and ask the teacher again and again,  
“When do we go inside for lunch?”  
“In a few minutes,” the teacher replies.*

Returning indoors is a relief for the children, who appear to be extremely tired. After having lunch, the children sit in the book corner to go through the books while the staff clears the tables. At one end, the children browse through the books for couple of minutes, while Natasha, the teacher on the other end, sends a group of four children to the washroom. It is time to wrap up, and promptly at 1:00 p.m. the children are led to the nap rooms to take a nap. Natasha, Laura and the other staff members remain with the children in the nap rooms to ensure they all have gone to sleep. Children who are not to go for a nap are brought out with their mattresses into the daycare class and have to rest while going through a book or doing some other quiet activity.

The teachers either sit in the kitchen or in the daycare classroom preparing their artwork. There is always something to keep them busy. Exactly at 2:15 p.m., three teachers and the director leave the center to pick up children from their schools while Laura and the preschool teacher, Amy remain at the daycare.

***My notes:***

*It's 8:30 a.m. and as I arrive, the director, Mrs. Paly, greets me. Suddenly, somebody comes running up and gives me a hug. I discover that it's Tiffany, an African girl. The other children quickly follow her lead. I am overwhelmed by their gesture and feel that my presence is being accepted. I tell Natasha that my next visit to work with her will be early the next morning.*

**Fieldnotes: October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000.**  
**Leaving at 5:00 in the morning,**  
**I realize that all is quiet on the western**  
**end of family housing at UBC.**  
**Driving over the Alex Fraser Bridge,**  
**cars are bumper to bumper;**  
**Dazzling lights into eyes making**  
**everyone alert and rise;**  
**I am on the road for a mission.....**  
**an experience with an informant**  
**at the children center.**  
**It is still dark when I enter the daycare,**  
**but I find several children already there.**  
**I am told that school children have a**  
**Pro. D-day (a professional holiday from**  
**school).**  
**Children between the ages of three and**  
**nine sit at different learning corners.**  
**It is loud inside the daycare.**  
**My eyes contour a spectacular**  
**panorama of children from Italy,**  
**Mexico, Poland, Vietnam, India, and**  
**Canada.**  
Ryan, a kindergarten child arrives, and I  
watch Natasha welcoming the  
child with a smile and exchanging a word  
with the parent for a short while when  
receiving them. At 8:00 in the morning, I  
observe a substitute teacher's arrival at the  
daycare to assist Natasha with the school  
children. Natasha complains to the teacher  
that she is tired of reminding older children  
to be quiet, but they do not listen.  
Suddenly, after carrying materials and a  
shelf of games to a back room, the other  
teacher, Neha, takes the school children  
into the backroom to keep them occupied.  
That day, instead of circle time, Natasha  
arranges a puppet show in the daycare  
class.  
I discover an old woman sitting in the  
daycare center. Natasha approaches the  
grandmother of a Punjabi-speaking child,  
Mandeep, who has been coming to the  
center for a month now, and asks his

grandma to leave. The lady replies, "No." It has been almost an hour and I find Mandeep still clinging to his grandma as he sits beside her.

Finally, Natasha asks me if I could talk to the visitor and tell her that her presence is disturbing the other children, and that it is not good for Mandeep, who has adjusted to the daycare environment.

I talk to the lady in Punjabi and listen to her story. She tells me that Mandeep has been having bad dreams and refuses to come to school alone. She relates to me that Mandeep is the first and the only child of her only son. She insists that if she goes home, the child will create trouble for the staff. On seeing grandma's desperation to stay, I ask Mandeep if he sees any other child's parent or grandma at the center. The child looks around and replies, "No, I do not see anyone." The child asks his granny to leave. The granny hesitates but then departs.

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Three weeks later,  
Teacher Laura requests that we go through the open-ended questions a day before the interview so that she can get a sense of them. She doesn't think her English is as good as the other childcare teachers' at the center. I familiarize her with the areas I would like her to talk about. Laura starts to relate her biography in her own way.

## **From South Pacific rain forests to North Pacific rain forests**

### **Laura**

"My life is a struggling battlefield in which I must always work, work and work to earn money in order to survive. At the age of fourteen, have you ever heard of a girl becoming the sole breadwinner of her family? In 1976, my father died, and although I was the second youngest in the family, I had to earn for my family because my brothers left our country.

Once again, for my family's sake, it was the winter of 1989 in January when I was pressured to leave my home and come to Canada as a live-in nanny. I was so depressed and felt sad leaving everyone behind. I felt like I was in jail while I was on the airplane."

**Laura:** I bring together different lives I have lived. My life even before coming to Canada was filled with a great deal of hard work and responsibilities that I was forced into. I was born in Sun Antonio Narvakan Ilocos-sur on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February, 1952 in the Philippines. My parents had never been to school. My father was a carpenter and my mother performed as a mother and helped him in growing vegetables on our land where we lived. In my family, I had my parents, and their seven children. I am the second

youngest in the family. We spoke our national language, 'Tagalog.' I went to a government school for my primary education - that was from grade one to grade six - and it was in grade three when English as a subject was introduced to us. I remember how much I wanted to go to kindergarten with some of my neighbors' children. My mother told me it was too expensive. I started grade one not knowing how to write my name.

After grade six, I was forced to stay home on my father's orders. "I don't want you to study further," he said. So I helped my mother with the housework and growing vegetables. Earlier in my childhood days, my two elder sisters had eloped with their Filipino boyfriends just after they finished grade seven. It was a disgrace to my parents' pride and family honor. I remember how my father felt hurt and became cold in his feelings towards his girls, but my mother helped me find my freedom by secretly putting me in Narvakan provincial school. She knew that I loved going to school and that I was a good student who was liked by my teachers. I was an average student in elementary and high school. My mother prepared Filipino sweets made out of vegetables to sell, and collect money for my tuition fees that had to be paid to the school on time. Though I was not a regular student, I had to live up

to the standards of my father, making small seaweed packages and selling them during my high school years. I would pretend to be sick and then go outside to study and sometimes I studied while cooking food. My father was having problems meeting the monthly expenditures, and in grade ten my brothers-in-law helped me with my tuition fees.

With that support I was able to complete my higher secondary school. Oh, now my mind seems to flood with old memories that I have forgotten (*tears spurt from Laura's eyes*). After grade ten, I went to vocational school for six months and after that, I took a three-month tailoring course. The primary reason for taking these courses was my father, who died in 1976. Though I was second youngest, I became the breadwinner for my whole family. Have you ever heard of anyone at the age of fourteen becoming independent and earning for her family? My elder brothers left the Philippines to work abroad. For eleven years after my father's death, I worked at several jobs in and outside of the Philippines. First I took a job in a drugstore and worked there for six years as a salesperson to support my mother and two siblings financially. From 1983 to 1987, I lived in Singapore, struggling to earn more money by working with children and taking care of them, doing



household chores, and cooking and preparing lunches in a food court. During that time, my brothers and uncles learnt that many women were permitted into Canada as live-in nannies. I was pressured to think and prepare to take on a totally different role.

It was in January of 1989 when I came to Canada as a live-in nanny. Living in a new country is a worthy experience if one is willing to take challenges; otherwise, it may easily turn into a painful experience on a lonely path. For the first three years I faced hardships. Coming to Canada meant going far away from my family, my home and from my loved ones, but God gave me the courage to face all that. I took it to be my destiny, otherwise I may have remained in the Philippines. Till 1992, I worked at different part-time jobs to survive the money crises. I worked as a homemaker, a live-out nanny, and in the food court. I could see and feel similarities, yet faced differences in people's attitudes. I have now started to be aware of my own identity: who I am, what I was. Many times, people thought I was Chinese but I never corrected them. But now, somehow, I have overcome my shyness and tell them that I am a Filipino and not Chinese. I have thought and still think, that my life will remain a battlefield where I

must work and work to make money to survive. Thinking about better days has always made me happy and sad.

In 1993, I came to know of a lady who had had a severe accident and required a full-time caregiver. It was Mrs. Paly's mother. The whole family appreciated the way I took care of their mother. They were satisfied with my work and I was able to develop a mother-daughter relationship with her.

During that time, Mrs. Paly talked seriously about her plans to open a children center. She said that if I could get an early childhood education diploma, I could surely work at her center. I joined her daycare in 1994, working part-time in the mornings and at the same time taking two ECE courses from Langley College in the evenings. No doubt those ECE courses took all my salary, but now I see myself from where I started and presently where I have come. I find a vast difference in my knowledge about ECE. The difference was not only about ECE, but also the way I looked at things. It expanded my knowledge and I am grateful to my Lord (God) for helping me. I came to Canada on a live-in nanny visa and after three years I became a landed immigrant - and now I am a Canadian citizen. Living in Canada independently has made me respond for the first time to your curiosity about who I am and from where I came

from and my background. No one ever asked me these questions in the Philippines.

Living in Canada is expensive and I share my apartment with a Filipino girlfriend who works in a bakery. We both share our daily living expenses. My brothers have settled in Hawaii. I visited the Philippines only once in 1994 and cannot afford to go back again. Whatever I save, I send some money home. My present job is my only means of survival and therefore, I feel committed solely to my job.

My past experience, and now the professional field (ECE), have taught me to observe, listen, and talk. I could not follow people's or children's conversations at first but gradually I started to understand what they were talking about. I enjoy working with children. As I believe, it is all about patience and loving care.

### **Teacher's Anxieties and Concerns on Early Childhood Education Curriculum**

Interview with Laura

[Telling Silences]

#### **Acquired ECE Knowledge**

I think early childhood education is a broad term. It reflects different programs and includes in its programs two different settings. For example, the two settings are firstly a home-base setting for children in a family daycare that could be licensed or not. In this kind

#### **Pedagogical Practices**

*End notes: These excerpts were taken between the dates of the 11<sup>th</sup> of October to the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 2000, and represent Laura's pedagogical practices, shown in this right column. On the left side of the column is her interview regarding her teaching.*

#### **Fieldnotes: October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

I have been in the center for almost three weeks and I now start to work with my

of arrangement, children stay at home with babysitters or nannies. The second is a center, based like this children center where I work. The center has a daycare, preschool, and out-of-school care, and is licensed. These are the two different kinds of settings in ECE that require nurturing, caring and the development of children. I have a lot of babysitting experience with children that I gained in the Philippines and in Canada, but how children grow and what they require - all this I learnt during my ECE training program at Langley College in 1994. I enjoyed doing my ECE courses and found no difficulty in understanding the child development theories at that time. ECE is important for adults who work with children. The main goal of ECE is that children get a safe and nurturing environment. ECE helps an individual to understand children, their growth and development, in a general way. Learning the ECE system in Canada and the goals of ECE and how to achieve them was very new to me. While doing my ECE courses, the instructors did talk about developmentally appropriate practices in which children's growth patterns are considered to be the same for every child. They always gave examples about children from western culture. It was difficult getting that

second participant, Laura, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Many times she is either asked to come an hour early or to stay late for half an hour depending on the absence of the director, or if another staff members are not available.

Laura is originally from the Philippines. She stands approximately five feet four inches tall, is thin, and wears her jet-black, bob-cut hairstyle with a black hair band. She always dresses neatly. Today she is wearing black trousers with an off-white sweatshirt and black shoes.

Though it is Natasha's week to prepare and plan, Laura prepares her artwork, as there are fewer kids at the center at this time. It is free-playtime and the children are busy playing. Playtime consists of four learning centers: the Art Table, Lego corner, Tool factory and Dollhouse. The context of the daycare is compatible with an early childhood education environment. I move from one corner to another, and am having a wonderful experience listening to the children's conversations around the learning centers. The children are busy discovering and inventing at the different learning centers.

Now it is art time and the children paint their imaginative drawings on easels and white paper with paints, brushes, colored pencils, and crayons. I watch the little artists perform, and their minds operate. A Mexican child named Miguel draws pictures that he says are his mom and dad. A Punjabi-speaking child, Sarjal, says his painting is his house under construction. Still another child, a Fijian girl named Nafeesa, identifies her drawing to be her teacher's portrait. Sasha, a Sri-Lankan girl, proclaims her art piece to be her imaginary cat, 'Honey.'

*My notes:*

*I see that most of the activities at that time are related to ECE curriculum norms. For*

culture into my head. And they strongly suggested planning activities for children depending upon their individual age level and needs. I also believe that a teacher cannot apply the same activities for a four-year-old child and an eight-year-old. ECE training program is for childcare teachers to provide activities to children. I really learnt from ECE about why children are important and why their upbringing at an early age needs a lot of caring. In ECE, we were taught to give choices to children for independent and individual thinking. In such circumstances, children work as researchers and find answers by exploration. ECE stresses the different developmental aspects of children like motor, social, cognitive and emotional skills, and it is the teacher's job to provide a safe, caring and enriching environment to nurture those skills. I learnt from ECE of the white culture, its values, and the things the instructors like the teachers to apply in their classes. My practicum experience was applying theories and finding them to work well in the daycare that contained mostly children from white Canadian families. After doing my ECE diploma, I have come to believe more than ever that if an adult has a real loving and caring

*me, it is important to watch and listen carefully to how teachers deal with problem-solving. I find Laura talking gently to the children, asking them to think: What could they have done to avoid getting into trouble? Helping children to think of alternatives is also addressing the guidelines of ECE approach (DAP).*

#### **Fieldnotes continue**

After snack time, Natasha sends the children into small groups to wash their hands while the other children sing songs like: "Mr. Sun Sun; Mr Golden Sun hiding behind the trees."

Laura wipes and cleans the tables with a disinfectant napkin.

When the children return from the washroom, they sit with library books. Teacher Laura reads a book by Robert Munch entitled "Feeling Lonely." As she begins to read to the children, I think of a similar storybook.

#### **My notes:**

*As Laura reads the story on feeling lonely, another children's author named Vivian Gussin Paly comes to mind. One of her books, called "Magpie", is about a bird that is a beacon towards moral direction for children who feel sad or lonely. I can tell that the children are pleased as Laura reads to them and later asks a few questions related to the story. Gradually the little ones are sent to form a line to go for a circle. Such transitions are very much in accordance with ECE traditions which state that children should be kept occupied instead of standing or lining up before proceeding to another activity. Examples of this include: singing while washing their hands, or moving to library corner and then reading a story before circle time.*

#### **Fieldnotes: October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

After Natasha is through with her circle

nature then that person should really work with younger children. Otherwise, joining the childcare field as a profession might not suit everyone, as it is a very demanding job.

activity, Laura arranges a craft table for five children, and at the next table, a coloring worksheet for six other children. As I sit with three children at a table playing with toys, I see a Punjabi-speaking child strolling alone. He then finds a red racing car and engages himself in a corner with a carpet illustrating roads and traffic signs. Another Punjabi-speaking child enters the arena. Both begin to talk:

**“Meno aho kar changi lagdi ae,” says Amrit.**

**“Aider tac, meri kar gorey red rungli haigi te haur pujde we shoo shoo kaardi hae,” replies Jardeep.**

**“Toon race lani ae?” asks Jardeep.**

**“Okay,” says, Amrit.**

Suddenly another child intrudes on their conversation. This child is George, a Polish kindergartener, who snatches Amrit’s red car and runs to hide it. Amrit sits quietly with tears in his eyes, but Jardeep rushes to the rescue by telling Laura. The only word he can utter is “George.”

Laura’s reflex action is a question. “What did George do?”

George comes out from his hiding place and delivers the car to Amrit. Laura approaches George, asking him to provide a reason for his act, and why he is hurting another child’s feelings. George keeps looking at Amrit, and replies, “I should have asked him before.”

A bell rings, signalling the end of free-play time. “Clean up time,” Laura calls.

*Children and staff move steadily,  
putting blocks and toys into their places;  
Carrying spindles and farmhouses,  
and putting the lids on Lego containers.  
I listen to several blends of sounds,  
murmurs and rattling of containers.  
Children throw blocks into a box,  
and lift tools and dolls to their storage  
spots,  
till they find free-play has been cleared.*

**Fieldnotes: October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

In the artwork area I discover Laura getting a precut shape of an apple placed for four children to work with. From an envelope she takes out round pieces of red and green tissue. She sorts them out and distributes one color of tissue paper to each child. The children quickly begin to glue after crumpling the tissues as Laura has directed. Laura discovers that some children are using both colors of tissue balls on their apples and says, "No, no. Just use one color because apples are either all red or all green. I would like you to use one color of tissue balls on your apple." However, the same incident recurs with a different child, Kimberly. I station myself at a table from which I can view the craft table. This time, the child uses red and green crumpled tissues and colors her apple with yellow crayon. When Laura sees her work, the child says, "I ate an apple that was red, yellow and green." Laura remains quiet and then replies, "It is alright to have so many colors." Besides craft activity, the children have other alternatives, like drawing, painting, or using plasticine for artwork.

*My notes: Each day, Laura's craft table has a precut shape (like a Jack o' Lantern, coordinated with the theme of Halloween) onto which she asks the children to glue or sprinkle something. In my first interview with Laura she tells me she believes that she focuses on open-ended activities. I want to tell her that what she asks the children to do is not open-ended, but I decide to simply take note of it instead.*

*Endnotes: I find Laura planning and preparing lots of materials and bringing in personal ECE resources that she bought or prepared during her ECE diploma program. Once she completes her activity, and the children are assisted by other staff, Laura continues to work, busily displaying*

*children's artwork on bulletin boards, or  
clearing and sorting doll clothes into  
containers, putting toys into another box,  
and placing each item neatly in its required  
container.*





*Three weeks later:*

*It is raining cats and dogs when teacher Greti and I sit in the kitchen area to have a first interview over a cup of tea. The other staff are busy in the classroom discussing the results of the recent American elections. It is the end of October and my third informant carries a Polish dictionary in front of her. She asks me what I have been up to since I landed on the shores of Vancouver, Canada. I briefly intimate my era of immigration and then ask Greti to share her experiences after completing high school. She relates her story in her own manner.*

#### **From The Pastures of Poland to the Parks of Surrey**

Greti

"It was my greatest desire to be an elementary school teacher, but just before I was to join the teacher-training college it was shut down due to political crises in my country, Poland. There was another training institute, but to enter I had to take a written test and have an oral interview. I was eventually selected and after studying there for four years I graduated from secondary school. I took my first job as an elementary teacher where I steadily worked for twelve years, and then taught for eight more years, in another primary school. When I immigrated to Canada my teaching degree was not recognized here, and I was forced to change my field of work. I came from a country where teaching young ones was an honorable and respectable job, but on completing the ECE diploma in Canada, and now in service for more than five years, I have come across degrading and humiliating comments from some parents. I wonder if my accent or my cultural background somehow reflected an inability to teach and care for their children. Yesterday, it was 7:00 in the morning and a parent dropped their child off at the daycare then later called me. The mother literally yelled at me, complaining that I had screamed at her daughter, which in my knowledge never happened. She asked me, "Are you Canadian? How different you speak!" The parent threatened to take me to court. It shook me, and I felt the insult like a spear in my throat. I cried the entire day, and whenever I saw that lady it made me think and feel that I was never going to be seen as a good childcare teacher."

It may sound funny, but I was born in September, 1952, in a small village called 'Osieczek,' in Poland where my

parents were born and had lived most of their lives. Our family included two parents and six children. Of the children, four are daughters and two are boys. I am the second eldest in the family. When I turned seven my parents moved to another village, called 'Zgnilobloty' near the city of Torun. Here our house was on four hectares (ten acres) of land where my parents farmed animals and cultivated crops. In addition, my father also worked in a factory as a truck driver. In those days, Poland had no private schools, therefore I went to a government school from grade one to grade eight. We spoke Polish in our family, as it was our national language, but of course a different dialect. Though in school the medium of instruction was in Polish, it was in grade four when we students were introduced to the Russian language too. After grade eight, I was to join a Secondary training school but due to political crises in the country, the schools were shut down. Another private training institute was in operation, but to gain entry I had to take a written test and have an interview as a prerequisite. It was my dream, or I could say my greatest desire, to be an elementary teacher. Since the secondary training school was a boarding school, I lived there and every month I was allowed to visit home. My parents always had just one thing to tell

me: 'Work hard and bring home good grades.' Getting good grades had earned me a scholarship and my parents had to pay only fifty percent of the total fee.

After graduating from secondary school, I took my first job as an elementary teacher where I worked steadily for twelve years. I was twenty when I began teaching. My family and relatives appreciated my teaching role, for teaching is a greatly valued and respectable profession. Besides, due to my physical appearance I was called 'The World's Beauty', because I possessed Greek features, was tall, had a fair and glowing complexion, and short blonde hair. During the first twelve years of my teaching career I got married to a plumber, had my first child, and when our daughter was six months old, we were able to buy our own house. I was teaching grades one, two and three. Every day I had to plan and write the details of each activity and display them in my classroom so they could be checked by the school management. All the activities had to be related to real concrete objects that were brought to the classroom, or specific places where children could be taken for an activity. It was stressful to plan, implement and get evaluated every day by some authority.

When my daughter turned five, I became pregnant again. After availing myself to three months of maternity leave to

care for my baby boy, I went back to work. Shortly afterwards, I accidentally got pregnant for the third time. It was very depressing for me, and my third pregnancy was spent in tears; but thankfully, it's all over.

In December of 1992, my husband, four children and I immigrated to Vancouver, Canada. It was my husband's great idea to come to Canada, as it was Heaven to him. I always wondered about his thinking. As my family had never been exposed to the English language before, we heard it for the first time in our lives when we arrived in Canada. We quickly realized that we were in trouble. In my view, it was due to not knowing English that we suffered on many fronts. For example, nobody understood what we said and in the same way we could never make out what others were talking about to us; therefore, we experienced great difficulty. I joined Kwantlen College to do an English as a Second Language (ESL) course as a full-time student for six months, and my children were registered in elementary school. I attended the classes and struggled for two and a half years learning English. Though I learned to read and write in a foreign language (ESL), I was unable to speak. My supervisor in Kwantlen College provided information on schools that offered early childhood diploma programs for immigrants. It was a difficult decision to make after

having twenty years of teaching experience as an elementary teacher and not getting any credit for it. To have to take an ECE diploma just to care for and educate young ones was hard to accept.

In 1996, I completed my ECE training program in fourteen months as a full-time student from Kwantlen College in Richmond. In order to get there to study, I had to change two local buses and do a carpool from Surrey. After achieving my diploma and being in Canada four years, I went to visit my parents in Poland. It was at that point when my husband gave me the jolt of my life. He had decided to separate and move out. In such circumstances I was very disturbed and felt dejected in a country where I had no other family member whom I could talk with. Everything seemed to be difficult and I was faced with the worse moments of my life in a different country. I had no other choice but to accept the challenge. I desperately distributed my resume. I completed five hundred hours of practicum on a voluntary basis in a government children-center near the Nanaimo Skytrain station. I also substituted there for a teacher at the rate of twelve dollars an hour.

At the end of April, 1997, a center director in Surrey responded to my application to have an interview. I was

selected to work for eight hours every day at the rate of \$9.00 an hour. After working there for a few months, the center director decided to quit her job and that meant I was out. In October, 1997, I received a call from our present center director to start working with two special needs children, and after three months of probation I became a full-time childcare teacher at the center.

Presently, I also work as a volunteer in a Polish church on weekends as an elementary teacher, teaching Math, English and Science to grades one, two and three students. My Polish community respects my teaching profession. That gives me great joy and pleasure. My children and I live in a townhouse, an independent apartment. My three daughters and son are very natural and spontaneous in demonstrating their affection towards their mother. We as a family believe strongly in living together and having good communication with one another. I have made good friends who have become like my relatives, and who, like me, have also emigrated from Poland.

I enjoy teaching young children with all my heart, though it is a different field for me in Canada. It is a profession that I feel requires lots of attention and respect.

## Teacher's Anxieties and Concerns on Early childhood Education Curriculum

Interview with Greti:

[Telling Silences]

### **Acquired ECE Knowledge: Insufficient knowledge**

As I mentioned earlier, becoming an early childhood educator was not my choice, but a necessity. My dream to become a schoolteacher came true when I was in Poland. And now after working with children in different daycares and environments in Canada, I have come to realize that my ECE practicum experience during training program taught me very little. I did not gain the real experience of a classroom in only twenty-one days of practicum. I feel I have learnt more in the children centers than from my ECE courses, about how to work with children who are different not only in age level, but in ethnicity and race. I believe that when parents trust teachers like me so much that they put their loved ones in my care, it becomes my duty to create an environment in which the child can feel happy and comfortable, and carry good memories of their daycare experiences. These experiences are very important for their well-being and growth. My focus is always to make a day of rejoicing for the child. In ECE, I learnt that

### Pedagogical Practices

*My notes: All that I document under this section of pedagogical practices are excerpts from fieldnotes taken between the 31<sup>st</sup> of October and the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 2000. They describe Greti's teaching practice at the children center and relate in the left column what she says in her interview.*

### **Fieldnotes: October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000**

As the time progresses, so does my excitement to learn more and more from my research participants. It is the 31<sup>st</sup> of October and I have begun my work with the third childcare teacher, Greti, who starts promptly at 9:00 a.m. and leaves the daycare premises at 5:00 in the evening. During my stay, I observe that she is sometimes called to work in the preschool on short notice, which she dislikes. She is to substitute for Natasha.

### **Fieldnotes: November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2000**

It is outdoor play time and Laura, Greti and Neha are supervising twenty children. The day is clear as the sun shines. Every child seems to be in a hyper mood, playing all over the outdoor area. A group of four boys run around, chasing each other, and another group of five children ride cars. The girls have taken ownership of the swings and slide area. The youngest kids are engaged in digging tunnels and filling up their buckets and cups with sand. The teachers watch the children closely while Greti is involved in doing problem solving with others. As I witness an incident occurring, I position myself to see how the teacher will deal with it.

Danny, George and Cameron have been

children should always be given a clear message, but a message with choices is very misleading for our center children. Anybody who visits our center can quickly make out that the children are from different family backgrounds. When we teachers bring choices to the daily activities, the children become confused. Either the child is unable to grasp what to do, so they start bringing toys from one corner to another, or they act robustly, creating loud noises, or sometimes get rough with the toys and one another, causing a lot of confrontation. At those times it becomes difficult for the teacher to handle the situation. If I take them out and make them sit quietly, they begin to howl and cry, and that I do not like. I think giving choices all the time doesn't work, as these children may not be getting that many choices at home. They find difficulty in connecting themselves with choices. In my case, whenever I ask a child to choose from the activities, I find they mostly choose solitary play to avoid talking. I don't understand that. Many times, children who wander around or bother other children are given time-out. When I was doing my ECE courses, we were told by the instructors not to give time-out to children as it was some sort of punishment, but in our

playing with a softball near the car area. George takes the dirty softball sweeps it against Tony's car. He then turns on, Danny, rubbing the ball against Danny's face. Danny knows that the ball is yucky so he yells at George and calls Greti for help. The teacher asks George if he would like to get rubbed on the face by the same ball. George replies, "Oh no way, it's dirty." Greti explains, "Well if you wouldn't like it, then Danny is upset with what you did." George approaches Danny and says he's sorry.

While Greti is resolving the confrontation at the car area, another incident occurs near the swings. This time, Neha tackles the situation. A child named Judah pushes a girl from behind as she sits on the swing. Judah has been waiting his turn, but Kimberly, while sitting on one swing, saves the other for her friend Jessica (Jessica is not there, but has gone to the washroom with teacher Laura). Neha intervenes to handle the issue.

#### **Fieldnotes: November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

It is free play time, which stretches over a period of forty-five minutes. Greti has planned the artwork activity based on a Remembrance Day theme. Other free-play centers available to the children include the dollhouse, tool factory, building blocks and table toys. Presently there are fourteen children and three childcare teachers in the daycare. Greti sits with four children doing finger-painting on precut flowers. At another small table she allows children to draw pictures. Children scatter to different play areas and look very much engaged. Suddenly, a child with paint on his hands bumps into the block area and accidentally touches another child. Teacher Laura approaches to handle the issue. Meanwhile, Sarjan and Miguel have begun to run around near the tool factory. "Freeze!" Greti says. Both boys stand still for a



children center it is our school policy to use time-out in extreme cases to make children realize their actions.

Moreover, just as I had no information on how to work with special needs children, similarly I had no idea of culture. It makes me really sad. I think in our ECE courses we should have been taught something about children from different cultures. It could have made my position as a childcare teacher easier in terms of understanding children. I get really frustrated when I'm not sure how far I can apply ECE with these children. It's my belief that there should be a link between home and school, and since I was not taught anything on cultural difference in ECE, I myself get confused whether I should or should not give choices to children. When we give, only one or two choices, we find that activity much more productive. There is less wandering and less confusion amongst the children. I have now come to the point where I can see that ECE never touched the area of culture. Only a few multicultural aspects were touched on, like bringing in colorful dolls and story books. The realization of differences is missing from ECE courses. I have gained information from my colleagues and friends who have completed their ECE

moment and then begin to laugh and run, chasing each other once again. At that point, Greti gets up and gives both boys a time out. Sarjan and Miguel sit on chairs at opposite ends of the classroom for five minutes watching the other children.

Another child, Chloe, sits alone on a chair, refusing to do any artwork.

Greti returns to the art table and I see George poking a toy dinosaur's tail into Judah's face. Judah bursts into tears, complaining that George hit him and it hurts a lot. Greti discovers a red rash on Judah's face. She takes him aside and places a covered ice pack on his cheek. I replace Greti at the art table and supervise the children in the meantime.

Greti asks George, "What made you do that?"

George replies, "Judah hid all the dinosaurs inside the toy house and was not sharing."

"But we do not poke things into other children's faces," says Greti.

Greti then asks George to look at her but George keeps his eyes down and mutters that he is sorry.

*My notes: I always think that perhaps children from other cultures refuse to look into their elders' eyes because to them, it is disrespectful.*

#### **Fieldnotes: November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

During free-play time, four learning centers are open for the children. Danny, Cameron and George sit around a table with puzzles. Beside their table, another group of children work with Lego pieces building a tower. I have been observing Danny teasing the children at the other table and making sounds like "gaga gigi." Danny looks at me and then bends down, knocking over the Lego tower. The architects are baffled. Kimberly, who was leading the children in constructing the tower, shows her agitation by hitting

diploma programs and have found that even these programs differ from district to district. Some ECE diploma programs emphasize safety issues and others lay great stress on music and activity-based learning. All leave out the important factor of how to make children accept and respect differences. I wish I had some knowledge of children from which I could build. These days, we teachers have started to work on getting the children understand differences, and respect them. While working with children from other family backgrounds, I have discovered that many children who enter the center have no English language skills. I find teachers struggling to understand what these children are talking about and when we cannot follow, it causes great stress for the teacher. We are not able to communicate with the child, and the child cannot understand what he or she is being asked to do. As a childcare person I find it difficult, and in my view, even the child finds himself to be in a mess. Children cannot communicate, and in the same way, neither can their parents or guardians. We teachers have a hard time explaining over and over again what they are suppose to do. Once Sarjan's mother dropped her son off in the morning hours and I was here at the center. Sarjan had

Danny with a Lego block. Teacher Laura emerges on the spot and handles the situation by asking the children to brainstorm solutions resolving the problem.

**Fieldnotes: November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

At around 3:00 in the afternoon, as the children are getting up from nap time, Greti, Neha, Suzana and Laura all leave the daycare to pick up children from different schools. Amy, the preschool teacher, and I stay at the center to look after the children. Greti has arranged four free-play centers for the children. The art corner is filled with loose papers, lentils, glitter and beads for children to make their own art projects. There is a table with puzzles. On another small table, the teacher has placed computers that talk and play number games. The fourth center has manipulatives. Children returning from the naprooms are sent to the washroom by teacher Amy. On their return, the children are asked to choose an activity. Some kids show a desire to stay at the computer table while others choose artwork. The youngest kids still sit in their chairs, trying to decide what to do. Greti and other staff return with a number of school children. Among them are kindergartners who join the daycare class with Neha. Other out-of-school children move to the west wing hall with their teacher Suzana. The moment the kindergarten children arrive, the daycare becomes more noisy and there appears to be extra movement everywhere. Children begin to run around while Laura visits the backrooms to see if every child has returned from the nap. Amy has left the daycare premises as she has finished for the day.

Greti moves around the classroom keeping the children busy at the learning centers. She discovers Jardeep holding a toy spike, pretending it's a gun and making shooting noises. Greti asks Jardeep to bring the toy

just begun daycare at that time. He started to cry and would not stop. I continued talking with the child, telling him that he would have fun at the daycare but he went on crying. I was really upset and felt like quitting my job. Later, I saw that the child was all wet, as he had urinated. I was not able to understand what the child had said, and I felt guilty. We have many Punjabi children in the center, and these children do talk, but only in their first language, of which I have no clue. I communicate with them using pictures; it works sometimes but not always. Language is a barrier that causes miscommunication when we teachers provide choices. On another occasion, Jashua, a Korean child, said something to me in his first language and kept looking at my face as if waiting for a response. I kept looking at him and he dropped his eyes and would not make eye contact. I have observed that children from other cultures never try to make eye contact, but in ECE we learnt that when we give a message, we should look into the child's eyes. It becomes really difficult for us as teachers.

I never learnt in the ECE program how to deal with special needs children, and as I worked with two special needs children, I always felt that I was at risk. My teaching career in this

and come over to her. He does not move, but smiles and refuses to look at her. Greti begins counting, "One, two ...." She pauses. "You still have a chance to come." Jardeep, who has been holding the pretend gun, now quietly drops it. Greti explains to him that guns are dangerous to play with. She asks him to make something else.

### **Fieldnotes: November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

I am sitting outside the dollhouse corner during free-play time while Greti, Laura and Natasha work with children at different learning centers. Greti is demonstrating her art activity to five of the youngest children, showing them what they can draw. She makes a round circle for a face and then asks Antoni, the youngest, to make eyes, a nose and lips. I observe Jashua making a big monster face with huge irregular eyes, ears and a nose for the facial features, but the other little ones cannot do it, so they leave the art table and move to another free-play area. Greti approaches Natasha and explains, "Jashua made a monster figure in his imaginary drawing but when the others were not able to do so, they got frustrated and just walked away. It upsets me. What will the parents think? They like to see their children's work when they come to pick them up."

At the same time, the children at another table are tearing colored tissue paper and pasting it on precut apple shapes. The older children follow the teacher's instructions more quickly than the youngest group, who walk away from the art table to find something else to do.

During the afternoon circle time there are twenty-two children being supervised by two teachers, Laura and Greti. Teacher Natasha has gone home and Mrs. Paly sits in her office doing paperwork. Laura sets up two play camps, the water table, and artwork and puzzle centers for the children to play. The two camps near the tool

center began with two autistic children. I felt that if something went wrong in dealing with them, my license would be revoked by the authorities and I would never be able to work with children again. I had to put up with these two brothers with no knowledge of autistic children, how to deal with them, or what kinds of resources I should use. Speaking of resources, we have fewer toys and other stuff for the children in the daycare. I observed these two children coming to the center wearing dirty clothes with food stains, and smelling. I discussed my concerns with my colleagues and the director, and was told that discussing children's cleanliness with parents is not appreciated in Canada. Talking directly with parents usually means discouragement. For me, it was a matter of health and safety. I really had to teach myself what "autistic" meant and how I could deal with it. I learnt sign language and prepared lots of picture cards to explain the activities. I wonder how other teachers would feel if they were in my place. But I can openly tell you that I went through a tough time even after doing my ECE diploma.

factory area are a treat for the children. As only three children are allowed to play in each camp at a time, the children must wait their turn. George, Cameron and Kobee have been playing for quite a while in one of the camps. Laura tells them, "Children, it is Ramesh, Jashua and Sarjan's turn now." Cameron and Kobee come out, but George stays behind and throws himself on the floor. Laura asks him what he is doing.

"I didn't get to stay in there very long," he replies.

Laura says, "Maybe you'll get a turn some other time."

At the water play-table, five children rush pell mell to occupy the three places. Two girls quickly take up spots, and Sarjan, without wearing his bag smock, enters the water area and quickly positions himself. Allana is too slow to get a smock on and disconsolately leaves for the art table, where she picks up a paper and colored pencils. She looks sad.

George comes to play at the water table. As he is late, he waits for a space and chats with the other children. He watches the water table closely, waiting for a spot to open up. Greti stands beside the children. When she notices Tiffany's dress sleeve about to get wet, Greti takes the girl's smock and rolls up her sleeves. George thinks that Greti is helping Tiffany take off her smock because she has finished with water play. False alarm. Teacher Laura announces a few more minutes for free-play before having a snack and a quick circle. She explains that later they will be going outdoors to play. Greti then asks George to come and join the water-play table.

♣

*Three weeks later:*

*It is December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000. I feel extremely cold as I look out the window and find that it is getting dark out though it's only 1:30 p.m. I am sitting in the kitchen zone with my fourth ECE teacher. She begins her story:*

**From Adams Bridge to Alex Fraser Bridge**

Mrs. Paly

*Adams Bridge is a Palk strait between India and Sri-Lanka. Legend says that Adam, the first person on earth, stood there.*

"When you stand in front of a landscape painting, you find that the prominent strokes of the paint brush, forming a house amidst rows of trees, make sense to you. The invisible lines and faded colors that merge in the background of the landscape somewhat form the pattern of my life history. I never experienced my childhood with my family because it was stolen. In the New World, I tasted many different types of jobs to survive: from nanny to chef, to preparing grocery baskets for seniors and walking for miles in deep snow to deliver them, to baking and selling food, and finally to taking care of young children."

I was born in a hospital located in a city called Kidibath, in Sri-Lanka. It was the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, 1960 when I came to this planet. As I was the first child of an eldest son, my grandparents took me away from my mother just three days after my birth. My mother was only sixteen and could not fight with her husband, who was the oldest son. In those times, my father was an estate owner which meant he was rich. My family consisted of my grandparents, my parents, two sisters and a brother. My childhood was spent with my grandparents in another city, named Kandy. I remember how much I missed my mother, and I constantly cried for her presence. It was only on vacations that I got to visit with my family. Those were the days that I cherished and looked forward to. All this happened because my mother was from a different caste than my father's family.

My mother was young and beautiful, so my grandparents accepted her for their son, but they dominated her in every way.

At the age of two-and-a-half I was sent to a Montessori preschool where a servant would drop me off and pick me up. I was given every kind of toy, but my grandparents never took the time to play with me. I could say they never loved me as I was not shown any affection. I always pitied myself when I saw other children playing, laughing and living with their parents. I was just a cute little thing for my grandparents. Though my family came to spend vacations with us, I never developed the feeling of belonging to my mother.

After Montessori preschool, I was admitted to a government school for girls where I started kindergarden. Throughout my childhood, I spoke only in our first language, 'Sinhalese'. It was in the tenth grade that I was introduced to English as a second language. We studied English for forty minutes each day. My final year of high school, grade twelve, was spent in a teacher-training program. I started my teaching career on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, 1979, in a rural government school. I taught in that institution for four years.

My life changed drastically when the Tamils assassinated my father in Kidibath City. My grandparents thought, as I was the eldest child in the family, that my life too was under threat from the murderers. The whole country was faced with an economic crisis and the rebels were attacking anybody who owned land or property. I was made to realize that since I was an important person to the family, it was dangerous for me to stay there. I had no choice but to leave my

country. It was under these circumstances that I came to Toronto on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1985, as a nanny.

I lived with my aunt for a year, and it was an eye-opening experience to look at life in such a different way. Living with my grandparents was difficult despite having every physical comfort, but here life was a nightmare. My mornings were spent doing house-cleaning and cooking as a live-out nanny, and in the evenings my aunt would make me clean her house or look after her children. After a year I was able to move to Vancouver where I got a job as a live-in nanny. In those days, I attended night school learning English and accounting, and got a cooking diploma. Basically the cooking diploma was my certification as a chef. I tasted many different types of jobs as you can see in the New World. These included being a nanny, and a chef, and even such things as preparing grocery baskets for seniors and walking for miles in deep snow to deliver them, and baking cakes and selling them to survive.

During these bake sales, I met Tierny Siva who was originally from Sri Lanka too. In 1985 we became good friends. Tierny was twenty-five years older than me and he became a father figure: a mature man with good manners. I started to like his presence, and on weekends we would meet after going to church. My family and I had followed the Buddhist religion before coming to Canada, but now we practiced Christianity.

In 1989, Tierny and I got married even though my mother and family were against it. In the same year, I opened my family daycare, joined Douglas College in the evenings to do an ECE diploma, and became a Canadian citizen.

Tierny was a positive influence in my life. He was my best friend, but at the same time was a difficult person too. Now you've made me think of the difficult moments that we spent together. Some days I would make two chappatis (roti) in a day and give him one at lunch and save the other for his dinner while I ate leftovers. I worked at the family daycare and took care of Tierny, who became disabled after having heart problems. He was an innovative person who would sit with me every New Year's Eve, making resolutions for the next year. We would review what we had gained and what we had lost and then make future plans on how to achieve our goals for the coming year.

By December of 1994, I had completed my early childhood diploma, a business management course, and a year-long, out-of-school certificate course. In 1995, I opened my present daycare in the church basement. After every five years I have to renew my contract lease to rent the basement. It was a big risk to begin the children center but I was prepared to take on a challenge. On one side, I had started the children center that had three programs, with three children and one teacher, and on the other I was still maintaining my family daycare with two childcare workers.



My loving husband and true friend died in 1996 due to heart failure, and I was left alone. I became very depressed. After a year, I went on a cruise and met a person who showed me how to meditate and recover. I now practice meditation regularly, and have discovered myself. My life has never been easy and it is a story in which I have struggled continuously, but through my inner force (spirituality) and honest work, I have been able to achieve my goal to take care of children. I truly care for and love children, and also care for their families. I try to make a difference in other people's lives.

### Teacher's Anxieties and Concerns on Early Childhood Education Curriculum

Interview with Mrs. Paly:

#### Telling Silences

##### **Acquired ECE knowledge: Insufficient knowledge**

Although I strongly believe in the significance of the ECE diploma for adults working with children, I have come to feel the differences in ECE regarding children from other cultures. Early childhood education curriculum relies solely on choices, where everything is left to the children to decide. ECE fails to account for structured activities, and bases every activity on too many choices, or activities that are too open-ended. Therefore, at my center, the application of ECE has become a struggle for my staff. As I have left it to my staff to think and

#### Pedagogical Practices

*End Notes: In the following column are descriptions about Mrs. Paly's teaching practices taken as fieldnotes between the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November and the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 2000. In this section, her classroom practice relates to what she says in the interview, documented in the left column.*

*Mrs. Paly and I discuss her schedule at the center and she agrees to work with me from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. As center director, she has a very busy agenda. Mrs. Paly starts her day at 8:00 a.m. when she and Natasha drop off the children at their schools. Around 10:30, they both leave the center as they are involved in a health-therapy program. Mrs. Paly returns to the daycare at noon. She often attends childcare meetings and seminars held at the Surrey Childcare Association. Therefore, there are no fixed hours for Mrs. Paly, and I start to feel uneasy about*

decide independently on what they feel is appropriate for the child, I find they carry out activities that are DAP-based. But it becomes impossible for us to apply choices all the time. I have already said that children at my center are from several cultures and many children come from East Indian or Asian families. For the most part, my staff teaching process follows ECE's, DAP approach in planning their daily lessons, but they tell me it leaves the children wandering around and getting into trouble. At the same time, I also have difficulty with the children who are brought up with lots of choice. Their responses create stress amongst the teachers. For example, when these children are sent to wash their hands before and after lunch, they tell the teachers that they don't have to do it if they don't feel like it. Similarly when children go out to play in the winter afternoons, they have to be dressed in their jackets for safety reasons. But they tell the teacher, "My mommy said I don't have to wear it if I don't want to." That kind of attitude from children is difficult to cope with because other children pick it up and respond in the same way, which angers the other children's parents. If I was only geared towards ECE then I would not be able

*my observation. I'm glad to learn that she works with the children on a regular basis for two hours in the mornings and from 2:00 to 5:30 in the afternoons.*

*During my three-week observation of Mrs. Paly, I see three themes emerge in her monthly plan. These themes include nutrition, the multicultural week succeeding Christmas, and all the planning of the daily activities. Mrs. Paly is a stout lady, conscious of her physical appearance, and is trying her utmost to lose weight. She has good taste in clothes and wears fitted items that make her look slim. When she arrives at the center, every child and adult greets her with a warm welcome, which she appreciates.*

**Field notes: December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

Teacher Laura has prepared paper mache for her artwork lesson. She has blown up the balloons, prepared the paste, and provided a lot of newspaper to be trimmed. Six children sit around the craft table, putting cornstarch on their hands and covering the balloons with paper strips. Mrs. Paly says, "Keep your hands on the table and do not stick your hands on another person. Otherwise you'll get glued to one another. And do not lick your hands!" All six children laugh at the center director's comments saying, "Oooh, it's so yucky."

Later, Mrs. Paly leaves for her slimming therapy and as she steps out of the center, teacher Greti rings the bell. Responding to the sound, everyone in the daycare puts away their stuff and washes their hands for a quick snack. Next, they are taken to the west wing of the center to rehearse for the Christmas concert.

At 11:00, the children get into their muddy buddies (rain gear) and boots and go outside to play.

*My notes: I find Mrs. Paly telling the staff*

to function. Even if I were to formulate ECE curriculum, I would merge structured learning with open-ended activities. My experience suggests that if we give structured activities first and then provide the children with open-ended activities, it works well. These children sometimes need an explanation of what is expected of them and how they need to behave in the classroom. It's a challenge for the teacher to understand each child. The question then arises: Has DAP approach taught the childcare teacher to understand each child by learning where he comes from, what kind of home he is being reared in, and how different parents raise their children? DAP has failed to tell us that. If teachers were taught these things, then child-care teachers would be better equipped to build upon children's experiences and to provide for their needs. They could contribute to the children's learning by making a connection between home and school in a meaningful way. *But DAP misses the whole map of culture.* I think ECE curriculum content is based on Caucasian values, and in my view, this means teaching from a culture that has no meaning for the other children. But if we let the child grow in a similar home-culture and then connect it to DAP, maybe then the transition could be more

*that if it is raining, the children should continue with their art projects instead of going outside. However, the teachers are always eager to take the children outside to play in the fresh air, whether rain or shine.*

**Field notes: December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

Greti is sitting with five children at the art table. She has precut a large X'mas tree figure which the children are decorating with different colored sponge paint and glitter. Once the artwork is finished, the children wash their hands and have a snack. The preschool teacher is absent today, so the children are following their regular daycare schedule.

At 11:30 a.m. Greti has a circle time activity. She tells the children why Christmas is celebrated, and what will be performed at the annual concert. Just then, Mrs. Paly arrives at the center. She enquires of Greti group, "Who is coming to the Christmas function?"

Almost every child responds, "I am and Santa will give us presents." A few children add that their mommies and dads will be there too.

Jashua and Sarjan get up and then start to stroll about. Mrs. Paly says, "Those of you not singing songs and who are fooling around, no presents for you." Hearing her, Jashua and Sarjan rush back to their spots and sit, mimicking the singing:

"You better not shout you better not cry  
You better not pout I'm telling you why  
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He's making a list and checking it twice  
Gonna find out who's naughty and nice  
Santa Claus is coming to town."

Mrs. Paly is thrilled with their performance. She applauds her little artists, giving hugs and candies.

When every one is done with their lunch, I find Sasha bringing a storybook for Mrs. Paly to read. Sasha and Jashua make their peers sit around a chair placed for their

challenging and more learning could result. For example, if we pull a plant from its root and then try to implant it somewhere else, it will grow, but it will grow in a different way, which could be crooked or bent. For me, children growing up far away from their home-culture grow like a plant rooted from its place. Therefore, teachers require courses on culture and its importance. Moreover, I think it is in the childcare teacher's best interests to acknowledge these children who are different, whether the teacher accepts their differences or not. The culture issue leads to the language issue that I come across with many children and staff in the classroom. I feel teachers are confused by the childcare rules and regulations that form barriers in their practice.

teacher. Mrs. Paly begins a story on a family who is decorating their house for Christmas.

The children sit listening to the story with eyes wide, and Mrs. Paly enjoys reading to them. She then asks the children if they too are decorating their houses with Christmas trees, wreaths and shiny tinsel.

Many children respond to her query, but others are silent.

**Field notes: December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

The children have just finished having their morning snack and are moving to the west wing of the daycare to practice for their annual concert. Sarjan arrives at the daycare around 10:00 a.m. His mother says, "Laura, Sarjan just got up and didn't have his breakfast. He needs his breakfast now!" Laura, Greti and Neha are quiet. Laura and Neha take the children to the other side of the daycare class while Greti stays with Sarjan while he eats his breakfast. Mrs. Paly comes to the center at 1 p.m., as the children are finishing their lunch.

*My notes: Laura tells Mrs. Paly about Sarjan's mother's request. Mrs. Paly looks at me and says, "I don't know what to do with some parents. They never read our newsletter, nor do they follow our center policy."*

*Mrs. Paly has brought cinnamon muffins for the staff, and when the teachers come out of the naprooms, she tells them they are for everyone.*

**Fieldnotes continue:**

It is 3:30 p.m., and the children from the regular schools are being picked by the staff and brought to the center. When the kindergarten children return from school, Danny, Mitchum, Kimberly and Kaitty run to hug Mrs. Paly. She smiles and says, "Oh my, I love you too."

There are presently five children at the daycare and three staff members: Laura, Neha and Mrs. Paly. As free-play is in session, Mrs. Paly sits with five children around a carpet that has a map of racing tracks. The children play on the carpet with colorful, different-sized cars. Mrs. Paly quietly watches their play.

Mitchum asks Jardeep to go racing with his bright green car.

Jardeep agrees and replies to Mitchum, "Meri terey kolan tez pugedy hai. Mein teno pichehe chudhan ga."

Mitchum responds, "Teno mery car da neyon patta, aye bari tez pugedy hai."

Both kids begin to race. In a second, George joins their race and pushes Mitchum's car off the track.

Jardeep thinks that Mitchum has lost control of his car and has lost the race. But Mitchum tries to explain to Jardeep that it was George who actually pushed his car off the carpet.

Jardeep says, "Toon choot boldan hain mei teacher noo dasda wan."

Mitchum keeps telling him, "Mein choot naiyo bolda."

Mrs. Paly is on the phone, as somebody has called for her, and does not see the incident.

The children are busy playing at other free-play areas like Table Toys, Talking Computers, and the art table. At the art table, children are cutting out pictures from old magazines and scissors to cut out pictures to put in their self-addressed envelopes. Mrs. Paly comes and joins the four children at the art table. The daycare is becoming noisy and suddenly, Jashua, a Korean child, screams.

Mrs. Paly says, "It's too loud. Where have all the bees come from?"

The children's voices drop for a while and I hear giggles, and the repeating of Mrs. Paly's word, "bees."

Jashua approaches Mrs. Paly, showing her

that Miguel, a Mexican child, has tried to cut his shirt. Mrs. Paly asks Miguel about it, and he responds, "I already said sorry." She tells Jashua that his shirt is not cut so not to worry. ♣

*Three weeks later:*

*It is the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, 2000, at noontime, and I am with the fifth childcare teacher. She shows great enthusiasm and interests in my research project. I tell her the nature of my study and give some blurbs of my own life history. Within a few minutes she begins to share her story.*

### **From the Taj Mahal to the Glass Mahal**

Neha

"I must confess that before immigrating to Canada my life was a bed of roses. When I was born, I opened my eyes in a huge bungalow with several servants and maids in the house. My mother had every thing she wanted and never had to do any work. After my marriage, my husband and I had a beautiful home that was done by an interior decorator. I volunteered to work at my children's school when they were in kindergarten. In Bombay, I also worked in a Women's Club. As a member of that club, I helped organize many charitable projects like clinics with free eye treatment for poor people. Moving from India was like moving from the pleasures of life, from royal status, to a difficult and challenging world where one could only imagine having all that I once had. I had to perform several household chores and do work that I never would have done before. I thought working with children, like at home, would earn a respectable living in Canada, but I found it to be pathetic."

My father worked as a scientist — a research developer — in a Sindri fertilizer plant that was established by the British. He had a Master's degree in chemistry, and at that time was employed at the plant and lived in Sindri, a small town in Bihar province in India. I was born into a high-caste Hindu family called 'Sharmas' on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 1963 in the same town. My family was my father, my mother, and an elder sister. My mother had an undergraduate degree. We lived in a bungalow with gardens in the front and

widespread green fields on the sides and at the back of our villa. As we had servants and maids, my mother had only to tell them what to do and the job would be done. The community surrounding our home consisted of very highly educated people who worked in the same organization as my father.

It was a small community and had its own school. I started my primary education in that school (which was co-ed till grade six), and the medium of instruction was Hindi. When I was in grade eight, I got my own 'Lamretta' scooter. From grade eight to grade ten I went to the only school available in the Sindri area: a public school that was run by the government. By that time I had learnt how to drive, and sometimes drove our family car. In grade ten I was made the Head Girl of the school and won the Best Student of the Year award. I was also a good debater and a poetess at that time. I never went into the kitchen area, for whatever I wished to eat was simply laid on the table for me.

After grade ten, I was sent to study at the Guru Nanak Dev University in Jullunder, Punjab where my elder sister was already in her final year of undergraduate education. During my final year of university, there was a political agitation at the Golden Temple in Punjab. The situation was



tense, and, we had to wait a year for our results to be announced.

In our family, all my aunts and uncles were very well educated, and they held high ranks in their professions. In Hindu families, as in other East Indian families, the relationships have always been strong and close. Even now, people still prefer to live in an extended family system, as family bonding is important. My father was the eldest in his family and he earned the great respect he was given.

In the spring of 1985, I got engaged to Ashwani, a computer professional. We were married at the end of that same year, when I had just completed the first year of my Master's. We were to live in Bombay in a beautiful home that was decorated by an interior designer. Shortly after our wedding however, we decided it was in my best interests to stay at my parent's house, study for my finals, and take my exams before joining my husband in Bombay. In 1986, I completed my Master's degree in the Hindi language from Guru Nanak Dev University. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 1986, I gave birth to a son in the same hospital where I had been born twenty-three years earlier.

Once my son was in preschool at Dera-Doon, I volunteered to supervise his class fieldtrips and the children's outdoor play. I had also joined a Women's Club,

where we organized charitable projects like clinics with free eye treatment for people in need. In 1990, my daughter was born, and shortly after that my husband was transferred to Surat, a place in Gujrat.

Many of our relations had been living in the west for the past three decades. Ashwani had been thinking about going abroad, but I never encouraged him. He applied for immigration and when the time came to start packing, I was sad. We sold everything except our house. Ashwani planned to work in the U.S., in Seattle, but the rest of the family was to settle in Vancouver, Canada. In January 1997, we moved to Vancouver. I immediately got my children registered in the public school system, and the transition was difficult and challenging for them. In the same token, doing all the household chores was an issue for me, and I felt depressed recalling my past 'meharani' lifestyle. To have a house of our own now is just wishful thinking: a glass mahal.

My husband started working at AT&T Wireless in Seattle. In order to get Canadian citizenship, however, the children and I had to stay on Canadian soil. There were times when my husband was unemployed and I had to work. I called several places like preschools and daycares so I could keep myself occupied. After ten days of desperate

searching, I got an interview with Mrs. Paly. I was called in for the day and the administration assessed me. It was the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, 1999. I started to work at the children center from 2:00 p.m. till 6:00 p.m. as a part-time childcare worker. In addition, I was also occasionally called in to work in the mornings as a substitute. I have recently registered myself in an ECE diploma program, and feel good about it.

### **Teacher's Anxieties and Concerns on Early Childhood Education Curriculum**

First Interview with Neha:

#### **Telling Silences**

##### **The ECE-based daily schedule**

Our children at the center come from very different cultures, and some of them live at the daycare from 6:30 in the morning to 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening.

Therefore, my goal as a part-time teacher has been to provide children with a safe place, making it a cozy, friendly, and comfortable learning environment.

Planning has always been a team operation at the center and I get a lot of help from my ECE colleagues. Child safety is always the primary focus of the planning process. The teachers and I have been careful to abide by the Provincial childcare rules and regulations. Since we understand that we are

#### **Pedagogical Practices**

*End-Notes: Neha, my fifth informant, is an East Indian teacher. She is a stout lady with dark black eyes and long jet-black hair that's always braided and tied neatly into an onion bun. She wears diamond earrings and gold rings and bright lipstick. She has a loud, husky voice. She tells me about home where she loved getting dressed in expensive saris and going to social events. She drives a white Toyota Corolla.*

*Neha confesses that all she will talk about related to ECE is acquired information at the daycare center. Basically, Neha's working hours are 2:00 p.m. till 6:00 p.m., but she is often called on short notice to substitute for absentee teachers. Over the nine working days from December 15, 2000 to January 12, 2001 Neha is called in three times to substitute. The following excerpts are taken from my observations of Neha's classroom teaching practice. Her interview is summarized in the left column.*

dealing with young children and feel responsible for their care and education, the planned activities are theme-related, and children can work independently without feeling any kind of pressure. I can't always plan what I would like them to do, because the children think differently. I always refer to the ECE curriculum-based learning books and search for activities that the children would enjoy and have an interest in. I have a mixed group of children between the ages of three and six, and I strongly believe that the younger children's attention span is shorter. Therefore, the activities I plan have to be flexible. There should be a variety of things for the children to do in the morning sessions and in the afternoon. The children love outdoor play so I always plan to take them out every day, rain or shine.

*My notes: I am amazed to find Laura speaking loudly to the children. She is usually so reticent. Laura has been left alone to manage the children, and she looks exhausted. Mrs. Paly has gone to Costco to get some food for the evening event. The preschool teacher is busy ironing costumes for the young presenters, and Greti is out picking up some children from their morning kindergarten school.*

**Field notes: December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000**

Neha arrives at the center at 2:00 p.m. Mrs. Paly, Greti, and Laura are busy planning the center's Christmas party which is to take place on December 20th, two days before the Christmas holidays. After checking the nap room, Neha asks Laura how they should arrange the free-play corners for that afternoon. The children are going to make Christmas cards, so Neha and Laura set about preparing the craft table with numerous materials like shimmering glue, glitter, colored paper and stencils of X-mas trees. Neha prepares watercolor paints and brushes to be placed near the easels. The other two tables are set with lacing cards and puzzles. Exactly at 2:30 p.m. all the teachers leave the daycare to collect the children from their different schools. Mrs. Paly, who was in her office, comes in to attend to an incoming phone call. We are both surprised when some children start coming out of the nap rooms. I supervise the children by guiding them to different free-play corners while Mrs. Paly goes into the back rooms to see how many children are still asleep.

By 3:30 p.m., every teacher has returned to the daycare with her charges. Neha enters and walks straight into the nap rooms to wake the remaining children. These little ones slip their feet into their runners, use the washrooms, and then go to their activity corner. Neha is at the craft table and Mrs. Paly is busy talking with the

pastor of the church outside her office. When Neha gets up to answer a phone call, George, Kobee, and Cameron start running around creating a lot of noise. Laura tells the children that it is too loud and they should stop running. The children listen to her momentarily, but then start running again. I observe Neha jotting down a message she has received when suddenly she says, in a loud, firm voice, "Excuse me! No running indoors."

The boys go to their seats and pretend to be busy lacing cards. At 3:30 pm, Neha rings the bell. Once the free-play corners are removed, the children sit with their teachers. Neha informs the children that their concert is on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. She takes attendance before moving into storytelling. As soon as the story is finished, some children begin to sing Christmas songs while others are sent in small groups to wash their hands. Laura and I clean the tables with disinfectant napkins and replace the tablemats. The children get their lunch boxes from the cubbies and bring out their snacks to eat. After snack-time, the staff help the children dress in their jackets, caps and mittens. The children are taken outside to play. Jashua and Miguel's grandparents have come to pick them up. The elders walk them to the attendance book, sign the boys out and then collect the boys' belongings from their cubbies. Neha says goodbye with a smile. It has become dark at 5:00 in the evening, and it is time for Laura to leave for the day.

**Fieldnotes: January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2001**

It is 9:30 a.m. and the teachers have planned to take the children to a nearby park for an outing after their morning snack. Greti makes a notice saying that the children and staff are going out for a walk and will be back at lunchtime. She displays it on the entrance door.

Older children wear yellow t-shirts with  
the center's insignia  
and younger kids wear orange pinafores  
with the daycare's telephone number  
and address.

After briefing the children  
Neha and I walk a short distance ahead,  
leading the little battalion on the  
sidewalk.

Laura in the middle and Suzana on the  
end escort children in pairs holding  
hands.

We pass by the private residences of the  
Crofton Court seniors  
and independent houses along a small  
stream that flows and gradually  
disappears under the main road.

Close to the pedestrian crosswalk, Neha  
stands in the middle of the main road  
and lets the small battalion cross.

Successfully we reach the green park  
where children run chasing one another;  
climbing monkey bars, slides, swings and  
tires

screaming and roaring  
expressing excitement and joy.

They all play and have fun till it is time  
to march back to the center.

Three weeks later:

It is the middle of January, 2001, when my last informant asks why I am not using teachers' real names in the project. I explain to her the importance of research ethics and then request that she share her childhood education and family background. She remains silent for a few seconds and then starts to speak.

#### **Lake Muskoka to Lake Cultus**

Suzana

"I wonder what I should tell you. I hardly remember anything about my childhood. Though there are many stories to tell, all that I have are sad and bad memories. I'm sure that there were happy moments in my life, but those I cannot recollect. For me, thinking about my childhood is like searching through debris for a jewel that was lost. Even during my high school days I had tough and rough times. It was hard to make friends, and at the same time I wasn't getting good grades. Therefore, I quit high school."

Anyway, let me try to give you some background on my family. I was born in Waterloo, Ontario on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1971. My family's ancestors were from Scotland. I was brought up in a nuclear family, and my dad's parents lived in our neighborhood. My dad owned a mechanic workshop and my mother was basically a housewife, and would do book-accounts for him. She never went to school, but was a self-taught person. My family was comprised of my parents, a brother and one sister. The residences in our community were all single houses, and the neighborhood was middle-class.

Thinking of my primary education, I remember that my very first public school was Saint Downe Elementary and it was a big, red brick building. I started studying there in kindergarten and stayed until grade six. Then I went to another school-Lincoln Heights Public School-where I did grade seven and grade eight. I completed grade nine at Blue Vale High School.

After that, my family decided to move to our previous family home in Brace Bridge, which was a three-hour drive north of Waterloo. My parents had bought a marina there, and since we had a cottage up the hill, the marina was moved up on the hill near a small lake. The marina was a gas station where boats would come and park and get fueled. My father also had a workshop there. Our house was in a cottage county that had become a resort for tourists. I remember that whenever we had a family feast or some other special occasion, our fourteen cousins would get together and have fun playing in dark rooms. We didn't have a television at that time.

I started grade ten at Brace Bridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary. I really disliked going to that school because Brace Bridge was a small town and I had difficulty making friends. I was also facing hard times with the teachers. It seemed like they were treating us like grade six children.



Later, when I had a boyfriend, things got a little better. But it was in those days when I started to smoke and got poor grades in my classes. I dropped out of school. I was working at Kentucky Fried Chicken but I still wasn't happy. I got myself back into school to complete my high school diploma but it didn't work out the first time. I dropped out and went back to school three times. Being twenty years old, I was the oldest student in my classes and felt too embarrassed to continue. I had resigned myself to the idea of not completing high school.

It was in the fall of 1993 that my boyfriend Gilbert and I moved to Lake Cultus near Vancouver, B.C. In April of 1994, we got married. I worked as a telemarketer for a while to earn money, and had begun to look for a new job when I became pregnant. Once I knew I was pregnant, I stopped looking for a job and had some time to myself. Everything looked beautiful to me at first but sometimes the thought of having a baby was scary.

After my son was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, 1995, my life revolved around him. I lived only for my little one. Once Mitch turned three, I started working part-time making perogies. I liked it because it was fun having some time to myself again.

When Mitch turned three-and-a-half, he started parent-participation preschool. I remember when I was a little child. Being the youngest in the family, I always felt that I was ignored and never got enough parental care and affection. As a teenager, my siblings and I never got along. Carrying these memories of my childhood makes me do all that I can to make my son's childhood days happy and enjoyable. Mitch's preschool had an awesome environment for children to play and learn. I worked in the same preschool on a part-time basis, and quickly came to realize that the teachers were not paid well and the staff was not serious. Shortly after starting there, an incident involving a child took place at the preschool. It happened that a child found a used syringe and later got sick as a result. It was an alarming situation, and it made me leave the job.

Around the same time, I called Mrs. Paly and found out that she was looking for someone who could work part-time with out-of-school children from 2:00 till 6:00 in the evening. I joined Burnaby Community College that same year and completed my ECE training program in December of 1999.

Gilbert and I have separated in a way. He manages homes for seniors but still gets to spend time with Mitch three times a week. Gilbert sometimes comes and stays at our place, and he attends our family reunions. We were

having marital problems so we decided that instead of having arguments all the time, it was best to separate, but still carry out our responsibilities as Mitch's parents.

I like working in the children center because it suits my schedule, and now that Mitch is in afternoon kindergarten, it works out well for both of us.

### **Teacher's Anxieties and Concerns on Early Childhood Education Curriculum**

Interview with Suzana:

#### **Telling Silences**

##### **Acquired ECE knowledge**

I think early childhood education training program is an excellent program and is necessary for those who work with young children. ECE teaches us about children's growth and development, and also provides general information for understanding the growth patterns of western families. ECE also stresses the importance of the learning environment and offers ways to improve it. At the same time, ECE puts great emphasis on the teacher's role. Therefore, one of ECE's main objectives is to provide children with a safe and healthy environment where activities are based on age-appropriateness and the individual needs of the child.

When I started my ECE training program, our instructors introduced art

#### **Pedagogical Practices**

*End notes: Suzana, a Caucasian early childhood educator, has a tall and sturdy physique. She wears blue jeans, a green velvet half-coat and Nike runners. She has blonde hair and always carries a bottle of mineral water and her coffee mug. She commutes in her blue four-wheel-drive station wagon. What follows are excerpts of my descriptions of Suzana's teaching practices, recorded from the 15<sup>th</sup> of January to the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 2001.*

##### **Field notes: January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001**

Suzana arrives promptly at 1:50 p.m. with her five-year-old son Mitch in tow. She enters with a smile, signs in for the day, grabs the attendance register, and peeks into the teachers' message book for the latest news. She takes some keys from the keyboard and walks to the west-wing hall. It is Neha's last working day for a while, as she is leaving for India for three weeks. Neha's substitute has come in for the day to observe her.

On the west side of the hall, Suzana transforms the morning preschool context into preparing for an activity.

and music courses in the first session. The courses on child development, behavior management, and guidance and discipline were all taught at the end of the program. I always thought a course on child development would have been more meaningful at the beginning. Child growth and development is the foundation of ECE, and it would prevent a lot of confusion for ECE students if it were the first thing they learned. Another thing I'd like to talk about is the ECE practicum. It needs to be longer. As it is, it does not adequately prepare students to deal with children from different cultures or children from broken families. I find that these are serious issues in the classroom.

I know many people who work in ECE, and all of them understand the importance of it and have gained experience through it. However, childcare workers need more than just an ECE diploma to succeed in this field. They also need to be caring, dedicated, and very responsible. The field of early childhood education is a demanding one and it requires teachers to remain on their toes all the times.

She moves the bulletin boards aside before placing four moveable shelves in front of and behind four tables. She places round and rectangular shapes on the tables, each of which is large enough for six to eight children.

One shelf opens beside the dollhouse area, segregating it from the other learning centers. On the shelf are different resource materials including plain and colored paper, pencils, paint boxes, crayons, brushes, markers, and worksheets.

The second shelf holds different types of games like checkers, chess, puzzles for the table and the floor, and Monopoly. I find Barbies and other dolls and their accessories stored neatly in plastic containers on the third shelf near the dollhouse corner.

The fourth shelf holds Lego pieces of different sizes, manipulatives, and science equipment like microscopes, pipettes, glass slides, small bottles, magnets, and mixing bowls.

On the eastside of the hall there is a long queue of bulletin boards forging a partition between the daycare and out-of-school care area. Three of the six boards display the children's artwork. A fourth board is reserved for administrative bulletins, including the teachers' thematic schedules and duties, information on the children's allergies, schools and daycare schedules, a new subsidy mandate by the government, and daycare rules. It also exhibits snapshots of the children celebrating at center functions.

Once the activity materials are prepared, Suzana is ready for her day. At 2:15 p.m., she and some other staff leave the center to pick up the children from their various schools.

#### **Field notes: January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001**

The children arrive, select an activity, and sit at different tables according to their age

groups. As the children pour into the daycare, the volume level begins to rise. In her gentle tone, Suzana asks the children to choose an activity they enjoy and to talk more softly. Each child appears to be engaged in an activity except for Zack, who is five years old, and Arnold, who is six. These boys have started to quarrel, and Zack throws some wheel spikes at Arnold's head. The tools hit the child and fall on the floor. Suzana is having a conversation with Mrs. Paly on the government's new subsidies policy when the incident occurs. Arnold cries for help and Mrs. Paly asks Zack to come to her office. As the children finish with their learning activities, they are sent to wash their hands before the afternoon snack. Neha and Suzana both work from 2:00 p.m. till 6:00 p.m., so they share the responsibilities and activities in the west wing after Laura and Mrs. Paly have left for the day. Suzana and Neha are responsible for cleaning the center after the children have been picked up by their parents or guardians. They shut off the lights and chain the back doors, lock up the moveable shelves and telephone box, and finally set the alarm before leaving for home.

*My notes: The children are playing outside. Two staff members and I supervise them as they run and play within the bounds of the daycare fence. The father of one of the Vietnamese children is standing in the playground showing something to Suzana and a group of girls. The assistant teacher, Jennifer, is getting the boys ready to play soccer in the dry area. I find the father showing off his new digital camera. He has been taking pictures and is now showing them to Suzana and the students. The father then asks the children if they know their e-mail addresses so he can send them their pictures. At this point the*

*assistant-teacher approaches Suzana and whispers in her ear. Suzana reacts and says, "Oh yeah! I forgot." Suzana turns to the father and asks him to delete the pictures. The father is angered by this and says, "I do not like that other teacher who mumbled something in your ear! Besides, I'm not going to use the snaps for anything!" Suzana replies, "Please, I know it's my fault for not letting you know earlier, but no one is allowed to take pictures of the children without the approval of the center director."*

♣

## TUSSLING AMIDST CHALLENGES

*My accent sometimes causes misunderstandings, and other times, laughter. I learnt to read and write English in Canada and as most second-language speakers do, I self-correct a great deal during my conversations. The experience of being laughed at or criticized never stopped me from learning. But yesterday, a mom phoned and raised her voice, accusing me of screaming at her four-year-old daughter. She asked if I was a Canadian. Later, the mom said she could take me to court for being loud. I started to shake.*

Most of our daycare children come from “broken homes”, and their language and behavior is both shocking and intolerable. These children can be very rude and disrespectful to the staff. It appears that these parents do not guide their children in how to talk with others, how to sit, how to walk and even how to eat. I can’t say much about it – it’s just my way of looking at parental responsibilities. We teachers cannot raise our voices or speak to the parents about their children’s negative behavior.

Spiritually, I am happy being a childcare teacher, but economically I am not happy. The wages in the field are very low, and this tends to affect the willingness to do more. I hope that someday, someone will change that.

Childcare is a demanding profession. I believe God provides me with the inner strength to work patiently with the children during the day. I have a loving and caring attitude, and feel committed to my job, but childcare rules and regulations take away many of our rights to teach about right and wrong. I feel emotionally and physically exhausted at the end of the day, because when the children become difficult, we always have to be patient, and gentle.

I have a strong belief in discipline and respect. We learnt it, as it was mandatory in Sri Lanka. I like to teach the way I was taught. I do what I think is in the best interests of the children. In Canadian ECE, children are not taught this way, because the focus is on decision-making. But we teachers try to bring other approaches to ECE.

My skin color sometimes gets me in trouble. I wonder how the childcare rules change from one licensing officer to another. Their individual evaluation can change a person’s whole life. Similarly, I feel my color is a big issue with some parents. They stretch my resources to the limits and want me to reduce the daycare fee for them. Many parents tell the teachers, “I don’t want my child to nap in the afternoon.” But the teachers follow the childcare rules.

*Those of us who work with children need to understand how our own backgrounds and position in society can influence the values and priorities that underlie our teaching practices, and our attitudes about others. Our thinking about learning needs to be centrally connected to the education of the child. I believe that, as adults, we become so immersed in the tensions in our lives that we become unmotivated and ignorant, we no longer maintain our native traditions, ethnicity, and language. We lose a part of ourselves.*

*There are lessons to be learned from teachers about where they began, what helped them to change and how their practices changed as a result. For this reason, I have included the teachers' narratives throughout this chapter, as I did in the previous. Except for one, all the women were immigrants. All were early childhood educators who had been teaching in the culturally diverse childcare center for more than two years. My interests lay in the interaction of experience and thought, in the interpretations of childcare teachers about their praxis, in the ways we listen to ourselves and others, and in the stories we tell about our lives.*

*This chapter reflects the central theme of my research: that the way people talk about their lives is significant, and that the language they use and the connections they make will help to reveal their world and the different roles they perform on a daily basis. Identifying teachers' frustrations and understanding the sources of those frustrations has been a difficult and painful process. We should not ignore how profoundly the social and economic environment of the daycare can affect children's lives.*



*In presenting excerpts of teacher's voices, I have provided a clearer representation of these women's development in the childcare field. This will enable people from the field of ECE and elsewhere to follow its complex course and begin to understand the visible puzzle it presents, the puzzle of the teacher's struggle to create an identity and form a workable practice. The themes discussed have been selected because the teachers themselves related great significance to them as the cause of tensions and struggles in their teaching. The illumination of their voices and reflections could have a profound impact on the theory and practice of early childhood education. Here are their uncensored words, relating directly to the complexities of their lives as teachers.*

#### **Taught one way, and teaching another**

*As a childcare teacher, I know that teachers unknowingly become the advocates of uninspired pedagogy. Although I hold the conviction that there are no pedagogies or curricula for children from diverse cultures, I nonetheless believe that there are particular values, beliefs and attitudes that need to undergird pedagogy and curriculum. Teachers' reflections about their pedagogy can help us understand how conceptions and values frame classroom practice. I invited my colleagues to share their views on their journey of teaching.*

**Natasha:** "I had a strict upbringing but that never reflects in my practice. In Sri Lanka, discipline and respect were mandatory, and that applied to home and in school. As I went to a Montessori preschool, I have always preferred to teach in a similar way. I believe I still carry Montessori values and try to

incorporate them in my teaching. I sometimes try to teach the children through stories about how different we all are and that to become friendly we must share our feelings and respect one another. Important factors like respect and discipline are never taught in ECE. Each week, I prepare activities that are based on ECE and Montessori teachings. There has been a recent shift in our goals at the center. We have been trying to merge some Montessori ways with the ECE approach in an effort to help the children to become independent through choice-making."

**Greti:** "I think what I teach is a combination of what I was taught in Poland, and what I learned in the ECE program I completed in Vancouver. I try to apply the appropriate methods that suit the children in the daycare at that moment. Sometimes I feel like I'm doing the right things with children and other times I'm not sure, so I follow the way I was taught in ECE. I prefer to plan activities that are similar to the ones I did as a child because I believe them to be effective. Teaching here in the center has given me an opportunity to work with children of different backgrounds and has helped me develop some understanding of how to work with these children. As a result, my activities don't provide a lot of choice for the children. I give them educational activities on things that interest them, but that must be completed in a time frame. I help and guide them as much as I can. I love it when the children tell me that an activity was fun. Whenever I feel tired and exhausted, I think of myself as a mother, and as if each child were my own."

**Laura:** "In my country, the Philippines, we were taught differently from the way I teach in Canada. In my home country, teachers had to plan and perform every activity, and the children were to watch and listen. No child was allowed to participate, only to observe. The teacher's work

was put on the boards. I apply an ECE approach at our daycare center, for that is how we must teach in Canada. We have to follow ECE as strictly stated in the childcare rules and regulations. It is really confusing for me. I find it hard to use ECE in the classroom because children get lost. Our director wants us to incorporate Montessori activities with ECE. Sometimes I try to bring in structured activities, and they work well with the children. For instance, today when I handed out the same coloring sheet to all the children, they had no difficulty in understanding the instructions. We cannot do this everyday as it is different from ECE."

**Neha:** "In my childhood, I was trained in the Hindi language and the classrooms were teacher-oriented. There was nothing like the 'hands on activities' that we do now. The only time the teachers would speak with the parents was if they found something peculiar about a child's behavior. In Canada, I must follow the ECE approach and all my activities must be appropriate for the children. I cannot raise my voice, cannot speak negatively about a child's behavior to their parents, and cannot direct children in the classroom. However, when the children get rowdy indoors, I raise my voice. I am helpless. I do not want it to happen, but it usually works in getting the children to calm down. My colleagues tell me that the director will lay me off one day if I do not stop."

**Suzana:** "I had some really strict teachers and many good teachers in my primary schooling in Canada. I want to be a "middle-of-the-road" teacher, but a lot depends on the child. I like the ECE approach in which more emphasis is given to self-esteem issues. My desire has always been to know the child first. I treat each child differently, although the basic rules remain the same. I certainly like a combination of structured and unstructured activities in our daily plan, but at the same time, I want to be less directive. My intention has always been to help the children learn through fun."

**Mrs. Paly:** "In my case, though I would love to teach the way I was taught, I have learned a lot from the ECE program. I learned the importance of childhood and that I missed out on a good part of my life by being forced to live with my grandparents. Childhood plays a great role in one's adult life, and it matters a lot to have good experiences in childhood. For example, I like to have some structure, but to follow the ECE guidelines as well. In the morning free-play periods, I always plan three activities, like artwork, dollhouse, and table toys, for children to select from.

Similarly, according to ECE rules, childcare teachers cannot give children any medication unless prescribed by their doctor. I personally take the responsibility of giving medication for colds or the flu. Though my staff strictly follows ECE rules, I do it at my own risk because a parent who works eight or nine hours a day cannot afford to stay home with a sick child. I sometimes get parents who stand before me and cry, saying that it is hard for them to bring up

their children in this society. I wonder why ECE policy is so rigid. In my own way, I bend the rules in an effort to help parents and children.”

### **Irregular regulations**

*After listening to the teachers' stories, I come to realize that they often speak about the Community Care and Facility Act (of childcare regulations), and how it creates a strict standard in ECE programs to be followed by licensed early childhood educators. The childcare rulebook contains detailed guidelines regarding the significance of the childcare regulations for adults working with young children. Under these regulations, the teachers perform their responsibilities religiously while clinging to the standard norms of ECE regulations. The childcare teachers indicate that in order to work towards these childcare regulations, they face difficulties that build further pressures upon them. The following excerpts highlight teachers' voices contesting these regulations.*

**Natasha:** “I have had difficulty with the childcare rules and regulations that hinder the extent to which parents are allowed to discuss their personal matters with teachers. We have quite a number of kids who come from single-parent households; therefore, how far can teachers discuss the child's behavior with the parent? I have to battle to get information from these parents, and then I have to wonder if the information provided by the child is true. If teachers are to work with young children in such a changing society where family structures are also changing at a rapid speed, then childcare rules needs to be transformed too.”

**Mrs. Paly:** "I wonder if the ECE licensing officers have different sets of rules for different people, and alternatively, if these rules change from one officer to another. They impose their authority, and can directly affect people's lives by canceling a center's license and shutting it down, or taking away an individual teacher's license for any reason.

At our daycare we had a special needs child. The support was delayed, but finally they assigned one teacher to work with the boy. The ministry responsible for children paid that teacher's salary. For three hours every day, a special needs consultant was sent in, and the mother was given special permission to stay at the center. This meant that three adults were working with the child and two adults were being paid by the ministry. In my view, a single teacher working with the special needs child would have been more productive and economical than having three people on board. I think the consultant's visit should have been reduced to once a week to observe the boy, and exchange ideas with the teacher so together they could create a thoughtful program for him. I feel that the areas where we really need support are not funded in a timely manner.

We also need help with the parents. We had a difficult situation where the single-mother of one of our children became unstable, and their funding was lost as a result. But my concern was for the child. How could I bar the child from the center? The mother was not cooperating and the child was coming from a situation involving the mother, the occasional presence of the father, the step-

father, and the mother's boyfriends. The child had to deal with all these people and was getting no help from anywhere. I closed my eyes and let the child attend the center. Such issues need to be addressed by the childcare rules and regulations."

**Neha:** "I think about whether these childcare regulations deal with immigrants in the same manner as they deal with Canadians. They told me that my Master's degree was ten years old; therefore, they would not consider it and told me to register myself in the ECE program without offering any credit for my previous courses. I wonder how they assess people in Canada who are in ECE and have degrees that are twenty years old."

**Laura:** "Doing problem-solving has always been difficult for me. Dealing with children in the classrooms is difficult because the childcare regulations take away many of the teacher's rights. We cannot teach children about right and wrong. It makes our position awkward because even when we are angry at the children's rude behavior, we have to be gentle, and patient and give them choices."

**Suzana:** "I think the policy-makers who form these regulations have the power to legalize a fixed wage for childcare workers who have achieved an ECE license. It seems absurd that they know the differences in the salaries of early childhood workers but no one comes forward to talk or listen. They know all

about it; they assess the center environments and the staff, and keep a close watch on teachers' criminal records, but no one assesses how much each teacher is being paid. I get upset when I think about it. It bothers many of us who work in the field of ECE that we are not adequately paid for our work."

**"Broken families, disrupted homes, and lonely & confused children"**

*I now begin a discussion on the social issue that teachers consider the most critical. The teachers unanimously agree that the children at the center who are having emotional and behavioral difficulties in the daycare environment, are those whose parents are experiencing relationship difficulties which cause family disruption. Most of these are immigrant families who work long hours to keep up with economic pressures. This is extremely stressful for single-parent families especially. For these families, the life-changes brought on by economic pressures are stressful for the adults as well as the children. After listening to teachers' stories about family relationships and the children's welfare, I have come to view the impact of parental separation on their children as severe. Children brought up in homes where couples are estranged, where there is no communication amongst family members, or the role models are bad, acquire behaviors that make them unacceptable to their peers, and disrespectful towards the staff. It creates difficult situations for the teachers who work with these children and try to create a healthy environment for them. I have also observed, children from close-knit families also exhibit aggressive behavior patterns. The staff position is further aggravated when parents refuse to support their children's education. In the following pages, the childcare*



*teachers describe their experiences of working with daycare children coming from separated or divorced families.*

**Natasha:** "We are currently facing a lot of anger in children that could be the result of something happening in the family. I think these children need to be shown the value of love and respect in order to achieve a positive attitude towards life. We need to help and support them. Our first priority is to give them a sense of security by developing friendly relationships with them. One child, "Bradley", is in his mother's custody. This child has started using bad language around the teachers and the other children. He gets in trouble a lot. He always bugs the other children, especially during free-play time. It's really hard to wipe those words from a child's vocabulary. As most of the parents are not supportive regarding their children's behavior, it's become difficult to determine how much to help a child, and where and when to assist."

**Laura:** "As many of our daycare children come from broken families<sup>29</sup>, I can see from their behavior and their eyes how they resist expressing their emotions and feelings.

Jardeep, a Punjabi-speaking child, lives with his mom. The mother drops the child off at 7:30 a.m. and picks him up at 5:30 p.m. He plays all by himself and never complains, even if another child bugs him. Look at Jessie: her parents are in the middle of a divorce. All her smiles have vanished,

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<sup>29</sup> "Broken families" is a term used by my informant childcare teachers for divorced or separated parents. In my epistemology, I refer to such families as single-parent homes.

and she has begun to burst in tears even if somebody wants to share her toy."

Greti: "Remember what happened at our daycare the other day when Antoni's dad came in to see his son?

We had to call 911. Antoni's mother informed us that her estranged husband had the boy's passport and might try to take the child. The mother told Mrs. Paly that she got separated a year ago and the child's custody case is still in court. The child's mother hasn't entered the father's name on the register forms. It was stressful for the staff when the father came to the center. We put the children in one corner and tried to keep them occupied. One teacher was on the phone with the police and I monitored the father while another teacher kept Antoni out of his father's sight. It was incredibly stressful."

Staff reactions to the incident with Antoni's father:

Greti: "I was scared because every day I read in the newspaper of a child going missing."

Amy: "My heart was pounding with fear and it crossed my mind that he might try to grab another child."

Mrs. Paly: "I have never experienced such a drastic incident at my center. It was not only sad but extremely traumatic for the children. I wish the government or the community could stop parents from splitting up."

Laura: "I just kept praying to my Lord to help us through this difficult time. I was afraid he might have a gun. Thank God nothing happened. It would have been bad publicity for the center and given us all a bad name."

**Mrs. Paly:** "Most of my daycare children come from broken homes and some of the children do not get enough food to eat. My heart breaks to see only crackers in their lunch boxes, so I provide them with food and try to help them as much as I can. I wish I could stop parents from disregarding their sacred relationship."

**Neha:** "Children from broken homes sometimes show disrespect towards the staff. I understand that these children go through difficult times in their lives, and sometimes they confide in us about their parent's behavior, but we are helpless. I try to be consistent in dealing with all the daycare children, sometimes directing them and other times suggesting that they think about their reasons for that kind of behavior. These children are young, and it is disheartening to see them behave in such a manner. I think their parents are to blame for being bad role models and not fulfilling their responsibilities as parents. I may be wrong... some parents do come and discuss their children's behavior with us, and we always try to work together."

**Suzana:** "The child I'm referring to has an attitude problem. As his behavior was resulting in fights and harsh words, I shared it with his single mom. Instead of talking with her child, the mother started to say nasty things about the other children and said her child was innocent."

#### **Parents' attitudes and expectations**

*The word "parent" is associated with several comforting images like invincible love, teacher, bread winner, role model, and provider. Sadly, some of the daycare's parents/ guardians show little interest in the well-being and education of their children.*

*They complain that they have no time to discuss or read the newsletters sent home. For immigrant families, sometimes the home culture or first language gets in the way of student learning. A lack of communication between home and the children center can result in the child feeling alienated or not understanding classroom norms. This theme represents an extension of the previous discussion on economic pressure, parental behavior and child outcomes. Teachers reported finding dealing with parents more stressful than working with children. Parents' attitudes have been a contentious issue for childcare teachers, for they cause a lot of stress and sometimes place the staff in tight situations. The teachers all agree that some of these parents require some guidance or training. An exploration of the issues surrounding parental demands and expectations of ECE teachers would provide much insight on how teachers deal with the trauma and difficult moments they face in their teaching lives.*

**Laura:** "When parents break up and the family splits, our position as teachers is weakened. Every parent in that scenario blames the daycare staff for their child's behavior. I really feel sad for the children. They are so small, and the moment the home situation gets bad, we teachers can see the child acting differently at the center. If I try to discuss all the examples of this, it will take a lot of our time. However, one example is Sarjan. His mother works elsewhere and she drops him off at 10:00 a.m.-the time when we're finishing the snack and circle time is about to begin. She wants us to feed him breakfast as soon as he arrives. It seems that many parents

don't read our monthly newsletter which contains our daily schedules and themes, and they don't understand that we teachers have to comply with the daily plan. It becomes hard for us because we have to decide whether to listen to the parents or go with the rules. Parents think we should provide their children with whatever they want, whenever they want, and that is impossible. They have often said that they don't want their child sleeping at naptime because then the child will not go to bed early. I wonder when they give their children quality time.

Another problem arises when our daycare children get dropped off or picked up by their guardians or grandparents and the message is not communicated by the child's parents. Either the grandparents forget to notify us, or the language acts as a barrier between the daycare and the parents."

**Mrs. Paly:** "With parents it's a different story--rather, it's a challenge to work with parents. I have to deal diplomatically with them. Approximately twenty percent of our children's parents have never created difficulties and have always taken an interest in their child's care and education and been supportive.

Sometimes I feel that my color is an issue. It's either that or it's their culture that makes them try to bargain with me to reduce their child's fee by five dollars.

Other parents tell me to bring in more structured activities and to give

homework to the children. I rely on my staff to try some structured activities if they think it will work with the children. Most of the children's parents do not read the newsletters and this causes problems for my staff. In turn, miscommunication causes frustration for parents and a few of them have told me that they don't like that my staff comes from different cultures. But I'm happy with my staff because they're all ECE-qualified and understand children thoroughly. I am forced to listen to the parents' comments on the staff, but I ignore their critiques.

At the same time, I do not like the family system and how social services operates in family matters. I personally feel that it is extremely bad for young children's development when families split. The family is like a nest for children and if the nest is broken, how will the children thrive? I know this, you know this, and the parents know this, but still it happens. Who is to blame? Our position as childcare teachers becomes risky and challenging when parents are in conflict. We teachers suffer lot of tension as a result."

Greti: "I was upset. I cried the whole day as I thought about Jessica's mom. I never yelled at the child and the mother kept telling me she would take the case to court. I felt miserable and wanted to commit suicide. I could never be mean to my children, could I? I was nervous, my heart was sinking, and I felt guilty for nothing."

**Natasha:** "Dealing with parents requires a lot of care and attention to wording. One misinterpreted word can cause a lot of problems, therefore, I am always cautious when talking with parents. I feel we teachers get little help from parents.

The children could really benefit from more parental involvement. Sometimes we get positive and supportive responses from parents who share in their child's progress, but most of the time there is no response."

**Neha:** "Giving children early experiences of education at the daycare or kindergarten is not enough. Raising children in a healthy manner is essential for the child's welfare and the family as a whole. I find that if the parents have attitude problems, their children will have difficulty in dealing with peers and staff in the classroom. For instance, I wanted to inform one particular parent about her child's behavior, but the way she addressed the other children was really belittling. The mother didn't believe what I had said about her child, and she blamed the other children. Then she blamed me, saying that I was discriminating against her boy. I felt so pushed down and wanted to quit my job. Later, the mother realized that her child had started speaking rudely to her. It is sad that parents must see with their own eyes before they will accept the truth about their children. I wonder why they give so much latitude to their children. The child became problematic for the mother and later she sent him to live with his biological father. I felt really miserable about the way this parent treated me, but I still wanted to help the child. It becomes extremely difficult for the staff to know what our limits are in these situations.

I know many of our parents work to keep up with living standards, but these parents find no time for their children, and even less time to communicate with us. Such non-responsiveness from parents leaves children vulnerable to confusion."

**Suzana:** "I would like to hear parents' concerns, but some of them expect me to sit with their child and help get their homework completed at the center. This is extremely difficult when we only have two staff for fifteen children in the classroom. Many parents send their children to school in soiled or inadequate clothing. It is hard to convey to these parents that they need to be more responsible."

**It is more than caring**

*Dealing with young children requires not just caring, but caring and educating. Teachers definitely have an impact on the lives of young children. They provide lot of stimulation with activities, books, and field trips, as well as by fostering interaction among the children in the classroom. Children might initially express anxieties about being in class, but often become very much attached to their favorite teachers. Young children often become friendly with and hold great regard for teachers who understand children and communicate on their level. Sometimes the regard for the teacher can be seen in the form of hugs, kisses, or flowers being brought for the favorite one. Making such connections shows that these teachers believe in their students and demonstrate their dedication. Developing connections with children takes time.*

*It appears that these teachers not only care for their students, they are also painfully aware of the life experiences of their students, including cultural background, language needs, economic hardships, personal struggles and community issues. I feel so strongly about the importance of this powerful "ethic*



*of caring", that I continue the discussion through another chapter. Let's explore why the center staff believes that working with young children requires more than caring.*

**Laura:** "When I am at the center, my mind is always on the children. I keep their safety at the top of my list. I always provide activities according to the children's needs, keeping their age level in mind and giving assistance and direction where and when they require it, so takes more than caring. **My idea is to help and support these children on a day-to-day basis, and that is not a job fulfilled by just getting a license and working. It asks for more than caring.** I really feel committed to my job, as I think teaching young children is my moral responsibility. I enjoy it from the heart."

**Natasha:** "Every child needs a warm welcome every day. Giving children a warm, friendly atmosphere, using encouraging words, and accepting children the way they are is very important to me. For example, some children speak Punjabi. I do not understand a word of what they say and yet they keep on talking. I keep wondering if they know that I listen to them and that I have been responding to their needs. I try my level best to help them express themselves during circle time or in free-play. I have to work with children by thinking on their level. They drain my energy, but I still hold great respect for children. I remember only too well coming to this country when I was young and having a hard time adjusting to

the new society. Teachers of young children require more than a smile and a soft voice. One has to be compassionate and effective when dealing with children."

**Neha:** "I like children to use good manners like "please," "may I," "can I," and "thank you." I try hard to repeat these phrases on a day-to-day basis with each child while talking to them. In India during my childhood days, teachers were role models for their students, who respected them. The teaching profession was and still is thought of as a prestigious profession. In the same way, I think dealing with young children is more than caring. It requires both mind and soul. Not every person can deal with young children. An adult working with children should have a lot of patience."

**Greti:** "I love it when children with happy faces receive me with smiles in the morning. I treat children equally by applying ECE rules for all of them. When children recall the activities I've done with them, it makes me feel that I have achieved my goal. But working with children from different cultures is a challenge for teachers. It is a struggle to fulfill their needs in all situations, a struggle to convey messages, a struggle to work—therefore, we need more than affection. We accept our children with acceptance and receive them with good feelings."

**Suzana:** "Working with children is a demanding field that requires teachers to be on their toes at all times—to be everywhere, staying close to the children and providing learning experiences. I really feel it requires more than an ECE diploma—it requires responsibility."

**Mrs. Paly:** "If you research, you'll find that many group centers have cropped up recently and that people prefer the "traditional" school program, which is very

different from what ECE offers. But I like to see our culturally different children progressing, so for them I employ a mixed approach, with some structure and some ECE activities. Working with these children educates us as well. I know that caring and educating comes from within a person. I believe that we first are humans, and to make use of what your gifts will make a better life for every body. In my life, the very next thing to God, is my work."

### **Connecting with the students**

*I begin with the premise that children from diverse cultures have important talents that can be used for learning. However, the teachers find that some children remain reserved about showing a lot of potential while others exhibit their emotions openly, and take an active role during circle time. My philosophy as an early childhood educator has been to start from where they are and then journey together one step at a time.*

*I have always been interested in other cultures and people and places. I have always tried to learn from different people. But it takes time to truly connect with a child and we need to acknowledge differences, in teaching styles and personality types. In the following excerpts, nearly all the teachers share their ideas and methods for making their classrooms more welcoming for all children.*

**Laura:** "Teaching has never been easy for me. In the Philippines, children are told what to do and they have to listen and perform accordingly. But in Canada, when a new child comes to the daycare, I work with the child as if I

were his or her mother, even though I don't have children of my own. Nurturing with love, affection, and patience, and giving the child some time to explore is important. Helping them to understand where they are, and welcoming them in a friendly way can surely ease the transition. As I learn more about multiculturalism and how to bring it into the classroom, I am learning to connect with the child in a much better way. For now, I try to relate through story telling."

**Natasha:** "As a teacher, being gentle, using encouraging words, and providing a secure and kind atmosphere where the child comes to understand that he or she is liked and appreciated, is important for me. Listening to children is also important, even though I do not understand their language. But letting them know that it's okay for them to speak their first language without problems arising shows that they are treated equally."

Greti: "I really struggle to deal with different children. They mix their first language with English words and it becomes extremely difficult to understand what they are saying. For example, Jashua, a Korean child, speaks in his first language and throws in a few words of English. It's hard to make out what he's saying. Sometimes the children cannot communicate their needs or feelings. I would like to know how to break that silence and make them talk. Therefore, I sometimes try working outside the lines of ECE to make the children feel comfortable."

**Mrs. Paly:** "Being the center director, I really have to work on bringing some of the children out of their shells. Most of my children come from East Indian and

Asian communities, and their home environment requires them to be quiet and take direction. In order to forge a link between home and school, I believe a multicultural approach is necessary. However, the center is limited in resources, and my having no training in the area of cultural relations causes difficulty in getting to know the children. We must be humanistic in our approach, and rely on our own intuition to build friendly relationships with the children."

**Neha:** "The staff works as a team. Some of us work in the morning and some in the afternoon, so to maintain consistency, we have regular meetings where we discuss strategy and how to deal with certain children. Our aim is to make the children comfortable and to work with them rather than asking them to work independently."

**Suzana:** "I'm not as rigid or strict in following the daily schedule as the other teachers. I leave it to the children to decide what they are interested in, but still try to maintain some sort of order in the classroom. As the children are happy with this system, I enjoy it all the more."

#### **Relationships and pressures within and/or with out**

*In the previous theme the childcare teachers have shared their ways of connecting with the children who are new to the daycare and still adjusting to its environment. In the following pages, the adults working in the center address the issue of relationships and how these relationships can create pressures for some teachers. The discussion about the relationships and pressures at the center helps me to understand and to empathize with the teachers from other cultures. Some of these teachers have suffered the external*

*pressures of discrimination and inequitable treatment. They say they have been expected to perform extra duties, which they feel stretches them beyond their limits. They feel as if they are categorized as being less fortunate, or from a lower class. Some feel as if their jobs are at risk.*

*The daycare is not without its own internal politics. On an individual basis, all the teachers have maintained a good one-to-one relationship with Mrs. Paly. However, some teachers reveal to me that the director has special relationships with favored staff members. These few are given higher responsibilities, like passing on the director's announcements and messages. They say that these messages are conveyed in an authoritative manner that causes tensions among the staff. These feelings are unhealthy for teachers trying to work as a team. My own experiences of living with the pressures of teaching give me empathy, but I have never experienced the level of pressure that some of these teachers have. I have never been asked by a school authority to do things that are not related to teaching or my profession. I begin to wonder if their cultural backgrounds have anything to do with their complaints of pressure and poor treatment. Are these teachers being overly sensitive in perceiving inequalities in their treatment? To understand who is involved in creating these pressures, listen to the teachers' stories.*

**Laura:** "I get stressed when I have to deal with my colleagues. We have staff meetings and we do plan our lessons and activities together, but besides that we hardly get any time to communicate. Without communication amongst teachers, things pile up and create tension within. A person like me, who is committed to working honestly with children, feels lot of pain as a result. Relationships

within the center create stress for teachers. Some teachers are favored by the director and therefore don't work as hard as they should. An example of this is our supervisor. She usually neglects to wash the dishes, or prepare her own art activities, so the rest of us have to pick up the slack. Though the director helped me become an ECE educator and gives me a lot of guidance in my daily work, I still feel pressured by her. I don't understand why she treats me this way, because I perform my duties honestly. It could be because I am the employee and she is the director of the center. When I hear from her that people are being laid off in other centers, I get scared."

**Greti:** "I often feel that only a few teachers at the center perform their assigned jobs religiously. When certain teachers have to do the jobs of others, it frustrates me. Every Wednesday and Friday we have to vacate the huge hall and put all the daycare stuff in storage because the church uses the hall on those evenings. Having to do this twice a week is a hassle, especially when certain members of the staff never help. Similarly, we have to set up one of the back rooms for circle time, and every morning we find that something has gone missing from the room. It is very annoying. We complain to the director and she discusses the situation at the meetings but then she makes excuses for her favored teachers, saying they have to work on other assignments. I cannot understand these kinds of politics. We are told to work as a team so we should work as a team, doing our assignments together as best we can rather than making difficulties for a few."

**Natasha:** "I am responsible for dropping the children off at their different schools and picking them up, photocopying materials for the other teachers, and bringing

out the daycare resources from storage every Monday and Thursday morning, on top of my regular lesson planning and implementation of activities at the center. I am so busy that at times, I am not available to work with my colleagues. I believe this gets me into trouble with them. It confuses me because I want to stay on good terms with my co-workers, but performing a supervisory role sometimes aggravates my position. My hectic schedule at the center leaves me really burnt out by the time I'm off at the end of the day."

Neha: "I do feel supported by my co-workers, but they cause problems for me. I sometimes have to raise my voice around the children and this gets reported to the director in a negative way. Maybe I'm wrong, but I feel that the director prefers some teachers to others. And at the same time I must say that Mrs. Paly is a very friendly and welcoming person and is easy to talk to. A few days ago I read a notice on the bulletin board in the director's handwriting asking why the children's fee cheques had been left with afternoon staff. I felt sad and hurt, as if I was being accused of something. I have never liked collecting the money, as some parents are hesitant in paying us. Taking the money, keeping track of which parent paid what amount, and then being responsible for it until the next day when I delivered it to Mrs. Paly was not only a headache, but rather stressful. I did discuss it with the director, but she said that she never meant the note to be perceived as negative. Maybe she was right, but when situations like this happen, I really dislike it. Why am I made to feel this way when I am always friendly and cooperative with the folks at the center?"



**Susana:** "When I started teaching at the center, the staff was allowed to plan and buy the resources needed for our practice. Ever since the director changed the policy on this and started getting the supplies herself, I find it difficult to prepare. I work in the afternoons, so I never get the stuff on time."

**Mrs. Paly:** "It really makes me sad when people try to take advantage. I used to try to please everyone but now I no longer do that. Many think that they can still fool me and I hate that attitude. I feel lucky to have such a good staff that works as a team and doesn't waste time. I am very particular about fostering unity amongst the teachers because it's important for the staff and the center."

**Perceptions on the childcare profession: What about my self-esteem?**

*The discussion of teachers' feelings about their work is important to me, as it turned out to be a powerful theme throughout the interviews. It projects the insights of teachers' perceptions about their place as childcare teachers in society, as well as presenting their first-hand experiences of contemplating how **others** view their professional identity. It must be recognized by all members of our diverse society that the childcare teacher's well-being and her knowledge about early childhood education is the key to the future development of our children. We as users of daycare facilities should be thankful to these women who elect to remain childcare teachers despite the pressures they face and the low wages they receive. I ask that my readers listen attentively to the way they talk about their lives as childcare teachers, to the things they consider*

*important, and to the language they use to reveal the world as they see it and in which they perform their roles.*

**Neha:** "I really enjoy working with young children. It is my desire to complete my ECE diploma, not only to better understand child growth and development, but also to fulfill the criteria for getting an ECE license. I once thought that working with children was the same as in India: a respectable way for women to earn a living. It is very strange for me because respect for the teacher is a virtue in my Hindu culture, yet my position as an ECE educator in Canada is pathetic. We childcare teachers are paid so little considering the responsible work we do. I would like the government to legalize, or fix a good salary for teachers who invest their time, money, and energy into working with young ones. In my view, childcare teachers should be awarded with respect, appreciation, and a better salary."

**Susana:** "Spiritually I am happy being an early childhood educator, but economically I feel burdened because the hourly wage we get affects the way people think about our profession. Sometimes I question my decision in selecting ECE as my profession. Another fact that casts us down is the way we are looked at by parents and other members of society. They think of us simply as child minders, when in reality we care for and educate children. I feel not only confused, but rather ashamed that we work so hard with little children and people still think that we just keep an eye on them. I want to be considered a childcare teacher. I wish the licensing board had the power to assess the wages of ECE workers."

**Laura:** "My experience in the early childhood area makes me think a lot about my profession. I know that the reason we are not respected in the same way as elementary teachers is because of stereotyping in the childcare profession. But the most annoying thing is that everyone wants their child to be in a quality childcare and education center, but nobody wants to pay for the kind of service that requires licensed adults who are honest in their work and love dealing with children. It is really difficult for me to live by myself on so low a salary. Whether we like the ECE policy or not, we have to live with it if we want to work here. There are no alternatives for us. No other center or organization will hire teachers from other cultures."

**Natasha:** "My main aim in my work is to make a difference in the children's lives, therefore I try to be a positive role-model for them. My educational background, the ECE diploma courses, and my experience have all given me the courage to acknowledge myself as a professional. I feel without a doubt that I am a childcare teacher, but others look at my profession and talk about the field as it were only babysitting. I wonder why such an attitude exists."

**Mrs. Paly:** "I believe in maintaining a strong commitment to my profession. I am an ECE teacher and I love my profession. In Canada, people do not treat ECE-qualified adults as teachers, but instead think of them only as caregivers. We are not just caregivers, as we put a lot of time and effort into becoming educators. As

ECE educators we ourselves should be careful to maintain the status quo, starting with the dress code. During my teaching experience here in Canada, I have found that many childcare teachers dress inappropriately. If we teachers are to be role models for the children we work with, then it becomes our responsibility to dress modestly, as our impact on children is very strong. We should learn to be professional. In order to earn the respect we deserve, I personally feel that we have to dress for it. Starting with our own behavior, we need to acknowledge ourselves as professionals and be careful to conduct ourselves in an appropriate manner in front of the children. I often see people at the ECE conferences dressed in very skimpy outfits and talking about the teacher's influence on children's growth. I do not know what lessons our children are learning when they see their teachers wearing such clothes."

Greti: "It was greatly disturbing to have a parent accuse me of speaking to her daughter in a threatening way. I felt embarrassed and sad. I never spoke to the child in that way. The parent threatened to take me to court and asked if I was Canadian. I work so hard with these children. From six in the morning till half past three in the afternoon, I play with these children, deal with their problems, sing with them, and create a safe environment for them. Parents do not realize this. Everyone talks about children's self esteem but who is responsible for *my* self-esteem? I would like to see ECE workers as respected as other teachers in Canada, because I was afforded that dignity in my first country. In Poland, teachers who work with children are highly valued, but here in Canada, the childcare profession is given a very low status. I think the ECE policy-makers could bring change if they wanted to. It is my desire to learn how to help my profession and my fellow ECE teachers get the respect we deserve."

*The idea that the learning process should relate to the six childcare teachers' lives is obviously a key component in their sense of empowerment and ability to gain new insights into their unique combination of identities. Their pedagogical attitude and their ability to take charge of reflecting on and incessantly voicing how they elect to change their teaching praxis is interesting, and reveals the pressures they feel to conform to ECE ideologies. This chapter elucidated the factors that affect their daily practices tussling amidst challenges within and with out. In the subsequent chapter, I choose to introduce children of this diverse daycare center narrating their imaginative language, their movement and characters.*

## PLAYING THEIR INNER WORLDS

I have come to this daycare center of children ranging from two-and-a-half years of age to five-year-olds to uncover the conceived perceptions that children seldom reveal in conversation. Instead, they change identities and hide in places that an adult could never think of; they speak in code and flee from invisible foes; they construct problems and resolutions using judgments that I could not have anticipated.

Although I am dealing directly with the childcare teachers, I know that my true gateway to them is through the children of the daycare. I am learning something of the secrets children keep hidden, and have come to believe that children do not live in the children's world that adults see, but rather live and play in their own inner world.

Those of us who raise children and work with them need to understand how our backgrounds and position in society can influence the values and priorities that underlie our teaching and child rearing-practices, and our attitudes about others. In my experience, one of the best ways to learn about children's ideas is to closely observe their responses to the early childhood education activities designed by their teachers. Not for a moment do I feel that

their play is childish. Indeed, watching them, I become child-like myself and am reminded of my own childhood play, and the play of my children. It is similar, yet somewhat different. The recollection is there nevertheless, and a connection is felt, as shown in this memoir:

*I was a child  
I lived fearlessly  
I played with dolls  
I ran, climbed and built  
sand castles and blanket camps  
I sang my songs rapturously  
playing orchestra with tins, bottles and cups,  
orchestrating me and my music.  
Now I see another child  
replicating me.  
She talks fearlessly  
runs and plays energetically  
carving her way vigorously to be heard.  
She enjoys telling her stories  
and singing joyfully her music.  
Synchronizing us  
in child.*

*Zoobi Waqar ...December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2000*

**Children, Children Everywhere. What do they role-/play?**

*This section provides an extraordinarily touching and compelling account of children at play. In my opinion,*

children's play is fully informative and important, though by no means explicit, to our understanding of children.

I am a participant in the center's daily activities, but I am also a one-woman audience. The daycare itself is a stage and the resources found there, its props. The teachers and children are the principal actors, while parents and visitors are given brief, cameo roles.

My observation of this daily drama is careful and deliberate. I study every action, watching to see if one of the smaller actors will try to grab the spotlight, or if one of the bigger actors will have it mercilessly thrust upon them.

I try to stay close to the actors, for I need to truly know them if I am to understand the various plots, twists and turns of their storylines. I take notes on all that I see, for while I begin as a spectator, I know that in time, I will become the narrator of this drama unfolding before me.

In this chapter, I introduce the daycare children as storytellers, and as actors, ever-willing to play themselves or any other role. My writing about them shows my willingness to share what I have learned in my experience with children, namely that they are at once convincing and open to learning, an unusual gift in itself.



I have always been eager to find out how children will react to stories and pictures that depict unfamiliar lifestyles and people. What information do they absorb, and how do they interpret it? What questions and concerns do they have? How do they relate these new ideas to their own stories?

I document their play under the different themes that have dominated the six month period of my research at the daycare. During these six months, I have seen improvement in the children's level of achievement in their learning and language development. Many children, like Jashua and Sarjan who started out speaking mostly in their first language, are now able to speak a few complete lines in English. Interestingly enough, I find that language is never a problem for them in their make-believe dramas.

Just like children's made-up stories, play-acting does not involve memorized lines. Children say what comes naturally. Looking at the children's social play, one can make out how their play-acting stimulates their imaginations, emotions, and language development. I have tried to draw upon the minute details of the different situations in which the children perform their assumed roles. I watch the children take on different roles and am transported back in time. To share the beauty of my

experience, one must be able to see the children as I saw them, and to hear their spoken lines, for it is these lines, these unassuming words, which hold the key to the playground of the child's mind.

I record and present their fantasy play because it is the main repository of their secret messages, and of the intuitive language with which children express their imagination and logic, their pleasure and curiosity, their feelings of jealousy, and their fears. I feel privileged to attend the daily performance of this private drama, this universal theatre that I call a daycare classroom.

### **Going mama papa**

*Through my observations, I see that play is a story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form. Who are these small people who suggest roles and plan plots to act out? It is wonderful to witness the children accepting each other regardless of race or color. I perch on a table next to the dollhouse and watch three characters who have settled inside their pretend area. The principal actors are Sasha, Jessica and Tauseef. Sasha has returned after being out sick with the chicken pox. Think of it!*

### **Scene one**

**Jessica:** How did you feel when you had those spots on your face?

**Sasha:** It was itchy and pokey all the time.

*The three girls decide to take on the roles of mother, father, child and sister, as they play in the dollhouse. They take on multiple roles throughout the scene.*

Sasha: Papa! Papa! I am going to skate inside the house.

Sasha (asks her mother): Mama, do you want to join in?

Jessica (as the father): No, no, you cannot skate inside.

Sasha: Papa, I am hungry.

Jessica (father): I am sorry, son, no time for supper yet. You will have to wait.

Sasha (asks his father): Could you take me out for a walk or should I go myself?

Jessica (father): No, ask your sister.

Sasha: Sister, do you want to go out for a walk?

Tauseef: Yes! But first we have to get dressed 'cuz it's snowing.

Tauseef: (to Sasha) Wear your woolen hat and mittens, okay?

Sasha: My kitty needs to wear something too.

Tauseef: I think kitty can stay, okay? Too cold.

*The class bell rings. It's clean up time.*

### **Scene two**

*It's morning and three boys are building a wall with blocks. Kobbie, Judah and Jardeep have taken the Barbie dolls from the dollhouse corner. At the other end of the room in the doll corner, some girls are searching for the Barbie dolls.*

**Kobbie:** My doll has pretty dress. *(Out of curiosity, he starts taking off the doll's clothing.)*

**Judah:** This one is wearing a skirt and a small top, look at mine one. *(He too undresses the Barbie and both boys begin to laugh and giggle, moving the dolls' arms and legs.)*

*Jardeep, who had been sitting quietly and watching them, suddenly wants to join in.*

**Jardeep:** See aye meri guddi the t-shirt neyon lahnde. Take off.

*Kobee helps Jardeep to undress his doll. After examining their dolls, the boys dress them and begin to play again.*

**Kobee:** Mama wants to go shopping.

**Jardeep:** Ok. I too. *(They all pretend their dolls are walking towards the shopping area, and ask for different items from the shopkeeper.)*

**Judah:** I like to have a box of chocolates. *(He takes a small block and carries it in his hand.)*

*Kobee and Jardeep carry a small basket from the dollhouse along with their Barbies.*

*At this point, the girls discover the boys with the Barbie dolls and start to protest. The teacher explains to the girls that boys can also play with dolls, just as girls can play “cops and robbers” and Pok’emon.*

### ***Scene three***

*Two girls, Sasha and Kimberly, are the directors of this scene. They assign different family roles to the other children and tell them how to act. The other characters are Jashua as the father, Sasha as the mother, Antoni as the baby, Kimberly as Sasha’s sister, and Tiffany, Tauseef, and Jardeep as other players.*

*Sasha tells the father (Jashua) to lie down so she can cover him with blanket, as he is sick.*

**Jashua:** Honey can I get some soup?

**Sasha:** Let me put the baby in the playpen so I can make soup for you.

**Jashua:** Thanks.

*Kimberly takes the baby, Antoni, and makes him sit on her lap while she sings a lullaby.*

*Kimberly catches my eye and says, "Teacher, look at my baby. He is having fun." I smile and she goes back to her play. Two-and-a-half year-old Antoni looks at Kimberly and smiles.*

**Kimberly** (to her sisters): Girls are you ready? Let's go shopping.

**Tauseef:** Mama, tell sis' that I have to change first.

**Jardeep:** Wait, I too go with you.

*They all dress up in different clothes from a nearby box filled with costumes, and put on high heels.*

**Kimberly** (calling again): Hurry! We're getting late!

**Sisters:** Okay! We are ready.

*Teacher Laura walks over and asks the actors, "Where are you going?"*

**Kimberly:** We are going to the mall.

*Tauseef and Jardeep say, "We are just playing."*

**Sasha** (brings a bowl of soup for her pretend husband Jashua ): Here's your soup.

*The baby tries to run away, and the scene ends.*

#### **Scene four**

*Five children are playing at the Lego table and have a box of cars beside them.*

**Mitchell:** My Lego building is the tallest building in Canada.

**George:** No, it's my tower that's the tallest one on earth.

**Danny:** Okay, see my racing car is the fastest running car.

**Jardeep** (*with sound and action*): My car fast aye pugedi choon choon kardi hay.

**Kimberly:** I can show you my house is the best and tallest. Look, Danny, isn't it?

**Danny** (laughs): George's is the tallest building.

(*Suddenly the table shakes and the buildings are destroyed. The children react.*)

**Kimberly:** Jardeep pushed the Lego pieces.

**Jardeep** (confused at his name being spoken): No I not do it.

*George looks angry and blames Kimberly for doing it.*

*After a moment, Danny acknowledges, "I moved my chair and its leg got stuck. Sorry!"*

### **Cops and Robbers**

*The curtain rises and the actors appear. Five-year-old George proposes a game of cops and robbers. Many adults who work with children will agree that when a group is at play, the children will follow a leader who dominates the action. No matter who the players are, the game ends only when the leader commands it. This may cause jealousy and resentment in the children who dislike the game. There are moments of truth in the daycare classroom that illuminate a particular aspect of the child's inner world. Such a revelation occurs during my conversation with George, who had decided to end his game. I ask George, "Where are the bad guys?" George responds with finality, "The bad guys did bad stuff and the cops caught them and put them in jail."*

### **Scene 1**

George (explains the plot to his team outside in the open-play area): Okay. Jashua, Danny, and Tiffany will stay in

the camp, and Bradley, Cameron and Sarjan will enter the house. When something falls, they all shout for help.

Mitchell and I will come in as cops.

Sarjan (dislikes his part as a bad guy): I not bad guy.

George looks at him and asks, "Do you want to play with us?"

Sarjan replies, "Okay."

*I am surprised by the organization and coordination of such young children. Instantly everyone rushes to take their roles and position themselves.*

*Tiffany, Danny and Jashua pretend to sleep inside the campsite erected by their teachers on the grassy area away from the swings. Suddenly, three boys wearing their woolen hats peek into the camp and enter. Tiffany (an African child) immediately screams, "Help! Help!" George and Mitchell (Polish & Punjabi), who are already near the campsite, appear on the scene and chase the bad guys away. They all run after them, shouting and laughing, while the other children watch their play with curiosity, wondering what it's all about.*

## **Scene 2**

*This morning the girls' play is full of cops and robbers. The scene shifts raucously between the dollhouse and the puppet theatre. The children pay no attention to the way*

*they walk, stumble or fall. The girls have decided as a group that they will play this game and the conscious organization has engaged my attention.*

Sasha (*begins to construct the play*): Pretend there's a stranger stealing a baby or a pet.

Pretend we're running after robbers.

Jessica (*holds a doll and looks at Sasha, her sister*): Do not take my baby. You know that babies have to stay with their moms.

*Sasha speaks to her baby playing outside the house.*

Sasha: Honey! Come inside, it's dark now.

Jessica (*tells Sasha*): Let me cook some food for the kids, sis. Please, can you take care of my baby too?

*Sasha puts the babies (dolls) on her lap and sings to them while Jessica prepares pretend food in the kitchen area. Jessica, wearing an apron, stirs some food in a cooking bowl.*

*Sasha starts making sounds like babies' crying and throws saucers and spoons on the floor as if the babies had done it.*

Sasha (*to the babies*): Look, be quiet, Auntie Jessi is making your food. Do not cry, my darling. Shshhh!

*Two other girls, Tiffany and Jennifer, quietly enter the house from the back door and take Sasha's kitten named 'Mena.' (The kitten is being played by Nafeesa, a Fijian girl.)*

Tiffany and Jennifer (*after stealing the kitten*): Let's hide behind this house. *They point to the puppet theatre.*

Sasha (*at the door*): Mena, come in, it's supper time.

*Jessica quickly gets dressed in "formal" clothes for dinner. When Sasha finds out that Mena is nowhere to be found, she looks around for help.*



*Cameron approaches Sasha and asks, "Can I play with you guys."*

*"Okay," Sasha replies. "Then you be a cop and I'll be the big police girl, right?"*

*Jessica, Sasha and Cameron run after the robbers. They follow them till they find them.*

*Sasha holds on to the robbers and puts them in jail before bringing her kitten back to the dollhouse corner.*

Tauseef: Meow, meow, meow, meow.

### **Scene 3**

It's 11:35 a.m. and two children have returned from kindergarten. They go straight outside where the daycare children are playing on the different equipment. A child named Kobe has been playing with Sasha and Tiffany on a rocking horse and the slide. The moment Danny and George enter the play area, however, the peaceful dynamic is disrupted. Kobe runs to welcome his buddy and George, wearing his black sunglasses, greets him in turn. Sasha looks sad and tells George, "I don't like you 'cuz Kobe was my buddy and now he's your friend."

George replies, "Well, we're playing cops and robbers. If you want to play, you can come." George then takes control of the game. "Listen, Sasha and Kobe and I will be cops. Danny and Sarjan and Jardeep are bad guys. We'll run and catch them and put them in jail in that corner, okay?"

"What will they steal?" Cameron asks.

"Diamonds," Kobe replies. The young comrades start running after the bad guys.

A teacher stops them. "Why are you running children?"

Cameron responds, "Were catching robbers. They've stolen diamonds."

"Call 911!" the teacher says, playing along.

"Yes, I did", Cameron says. "They're also running after the robbers!"

*I see that if one bad guy gets caught, another bad guy comes to his rescue.*

Quickly Sasha shouts to Kobe, "Go to the other end!"

George and Kobe encircle the bad guys, who have become tired of running, and force them to surrender.

*It is inspiring to watch and listen to the process by which children think about cops and robbers (good and bad). The children are the masters of their own games, relying on their own resources to deal with one another and to discourage jealousy and fear. They work together to further the cause of righteousness by removing the bad guys.*

### **Trip to the pumpkin patch**

It has been raining cats and dogs since last night, and tiny streams of water flow through the contours of my umbrella as I step into the daycare.

I find an unusual scene.

The learning centers are open for all the children to use; they usually only remain open for the young children.

The school-age, preschool, and daycare children are all doing hands-on activities. Teacher Laura is helping the children put on the yellow shirts they wear to identify them on field trips and the supervisor is packing the children's lunches into the teachers' backpacks and dividing the kids into groups. Everyone seems hyper with excitement and the whispers get louder.

It is the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 2000, and a trip has been arranged to the

Pumpkin patch at Alder Acres,

a yellow schoolbus waits outside for us

as the supervisor briefs the center children with information;

and each adult then takes her group of youngsters to the loo

Mrs. Paly checks with the supervisor,  
"Do you have the emergency kit, the children's emergency cards, the lunches and the cell phone with you?"  
"Yes, I have all these items," says the supervisor.  
Mrs. Paly seeks everyone's attention and in no time the children stand in three lines according to height. The first row of children boards the bus with Mrs. Paly and are made to sit right at the back with their teachers. The second row is our daycare class who take their seats in the middle of the bus with their elders. Finally, the preschool children, the preschool teacher and two parents who have volunteered to accompany us, take positions in the front of the vehicle.  
Mrs. Paly waves to us and we exchange goodbyes as the bus pulls out at 9:45 a.m.

passing through the busy roads we sing fast, rhythmic nursery rhymes to stimulate curiosity and to enjoy these momentary moments of the journey.  
We pass by parks, fields and farms, heading onto the small and narrow roads of a suburban city to finally reach the place of interest  
'the pumpkin patch area.'

as our bus halts, a lady bearing the name "Sylvia Anderson" on a shiny golden name-tag approaches us.  
She presents a schedule for our children to follow.  
I can see several other school groups like ours as they are dress-coded with different colored t-shirts to be easily identified by their staff.  
We are taken on a hayride into the pumpkin patch by a tractor trailer that is covered on top with a thick parachute canopy,  
it is not as we had imagined, but is a very real experience of moving through an uneven land of wet, thick mud and puddles that have emerged from the heavy night rain but it creates many oohs, aahs and ouches and makes nearly every child giggle and laugh.  
Right in the center of the field the driver stops the tractor-trailer and says,  
"Now you can search for a pumpkin and after ten minutes we will return."  
The teachers help the younger ones climb down from the trailer and give them plastic bags to carry their pumpkins.

The children move around enjoying the feel of stomping in the puddles in their gum boots, trying to carry the largest pumpkins and when this fails, finding one they can manage to carry.

Once everyone has a pumpkin in their bag and is on back the tractor, we return to the bus stand.

Leaving our pumpkins on the bus next to our seats, the teachers confirm the head count.

In small groups we move around looking at the indoor farm animals.

Around 11:50 we have our lunch

Under a canopy of lush green trees that provide shelter and protect us from the rain.

We listen to a couple

playing their guitars and singing melodiously, dressed in fancy cowboy and cowgirl costumes.

This music in the air delays our hunger as the children dance and play.

It has become windy and wet

but the children have fun in their rain gear

roaming from one farm to another

petting

emus, goats and kids, hens, ducks and turkeys,

llamas, pigs, cows and horses

all enjoying being looked at by the children

as they

get gently patted on their heads.

Many passengers on the next hayride wave at us

while

children return the salute.

The teachers buy pumpkin jelly and chutneys and it is time to return to our bus for departure.

A few kids still appear to have lots of energy

but the young ones take a nap as the bus drives us back to the children center.

Many parents and guardians are waiting to receive their offsprings and grandchildren.

Mrs. Paly and everyone on the trip combine their voices to cry

"Three cheers to the pumpkin patch, hip hip hurrah!"

## **Children tell Halloween tales, and go party**

*Let's discover what's happening at the daycare on Halloween:*

It's October 31<sup>st</sup> and the daycare has been arranged for the special occasion

as two moveables (bulletin boards) exhibiting the children's artwork emphasize the Halloween theme and create a background for the stage performance.

Mr. Pumpkin, an orange plastic man stuffed with ripped up paper by the children and dressed in a gentleman's suit is made to sit on an armchair in the middle of the two artwork bulletin boards.

On either ends of the moveables sit two Jack o'Lanterns elegantly lit.

The whole ceiling in the daycare classroom is embellished with paper skeletons,

black spiders, pumpkins and ghosts;

black and orange balloons add gaiety to the celebration.

Children dance around in their grand Halloween costumes from one end of the hall to the entrance door receiving peers and teachers,

showing themselves off in action, with make up, all pride and smiles.

Everyone gets goose bumps when an adult enters as a witch, the children ask, "Who's that?"

I am envisioning an explosion of pride and enthusiasm amongst children and adults alike, as the celebration spans little artists with different characters.

Teacher Laura announces each child's name and mentions the individual costume that she or he is wearing.

*(The children's costumes further show why I call this a culturally diverse classroom.)*

**Tiffany  
(African) as a  
clown**

**Nick (Mixed  
First Nations &  
Caucasian) as  
Shaggy from  
the cartoon  
"Scooby Doo"**

**Kobee  
(Caucasian) boy  
as a Dijimon**

**Cameron  
(German &  
British) as  
an  
orangutan**

**Antoni  
(Polish) as  
Father  
Christmas**

**Jardeep  
(Punjabi)  
as a ghost**

**Sasha (Sri-  
Lankan)  
as a dalmation**

**Sarjan  
(Punjabi)  
as  
Spiderman**

**Mitchell  
(Punjabi)  
as a  
Poke'mon  
character**

**Ramesh (Sri  
Lankan)  
wearing a  
horror mask**

**Judah  
(Caucasian)  
as a T-rex  
dinosaur**

**George  
(Polish) as  
Robin from  
"Batman"**

**Leah  
(Caucasian)  
as a bumbl-  
bee**

**Jashua  
(Korean)  
as Simba**

**Justine  
(Korean-  
Caucasian) as  
Snow White**

**Jessica  
(Caucasian) as  
a princess  
wearing a  
Disney Land  
dress**

**Tauseef  
(Fijian  
Muslim) as a  
mermaid**

**Kimberly  
(Caucasian)  
as a  
witch**

**Danny  
(Brazilian)  
as an  
alligator**

**Akash (Punjabi)  
as a princess**

**Jennifer  
(Caucasian)  
as Snow White**

**Chole  
(Taiwanese)  
as a  
sunflower**

### ***Children tell Halloween tales and go party (cont.)***

Teacher Laura and I arrange all the small chairs so the spectators can sit facing the stage. The participants are their own audience because after they perform their part they go back to their seats.

As Greti has to leave to pick up a child from school, I am asked to fill in for her. My job is to invite the children to say something or to perform. I think of asking the children to come up on stage and tell Halloween tales. With the help of Laura and Mrs. Paly, I set up a microphone and tape recorder to record the children's stories. The fact that the children are so excited about performing, shows that play, along with storytelling and acting, is a universal learning medium. As the storytelling activity is announced to the children, they become eager to tell their tales.

The classroom lights are gradually turned off but the backstage tube lights and Jack o'Lantern candles provide sufficient illumination. Soft and soothing symphony music is played in the background. I come to the realization that the children are learning something new through this experience and will use this new information as the need arises.

*Kimberly, disguised as a witch, tells her story in her own words:*

**"Once upon a time there was a fire dragon.**

**He went to buy a horse. But then the store was closed, so he went to Save On Foods and found the whole store was closed. My mommy and I were walking on the sidewalk and saw all that happened with the fire dragon. The fire dragon was sad and left. The end."**

*All the children clap for Kimberly. I see many children anxiously waiting for their turn, but some show reluctance to speak in front of the audience.*

As I listen to the children's fantasy Halloween stories, I begin to see in new ways that only by reaching into the imagination of each child can we proceed together in mutual enterprise. Here are approximately two-dozen children in self-selected costumes, each performing a different drama, each inviting the audience into the different settings of their inner world. Does no one ever inquire as to what is going on?

*Judah, wearing his T-rex attire is next.*

**"Once upon a time there was a vampire in the town. A spider got on the vampire's nose. The vampire killed this spider and all the other spiders till there were none left in the town. The end."**

*Jardeep, a Punjabi-speaking child, holds his hand up high in the air calling, "Teacher, me." I ask him to come and tell his story. Wearing his ghost mask, Jardeep stands before the group and says:*

**"A big pumpkin...pumpkin meray kar aya see. Mein noo pumpkin patch to leanda se, Mummy ne cut ditta. Mummy ne eyes sohni jai lagdi lai oaur bouy pori uttay keep kita wey."**



*It is wonderful to listen to Jardeep's story. It is full of expression and describes the pumpkin he picked from the pumpkin patch.*

*Next is Nick in his Shaggy costume. He is very excited, and begins to speak in his baby talk:*

**"I was going to be Scooby Dooby Doo. I saw a vampire and he attacked our house door saying, 'trick or treat.' The vampire said, 'I want candies, and red ones.' Mommy gave candies. He looked at me and said, 'You are Shaggy and your daddy is Scooby Doby Doo. Thank you.'"**

*Jashua walks confidently to the stage. He is wearing a Simba costume.*

**"A pumpkin and a party dragon. A pumpkin got cut and all the dragons went to a party. All the pumpkins were bought from the market. The dragons had no pumpkins to eat. The dragons were sad and ran away. The end."**

*Next comes Sasha in her dalmation apparel. Her story reflects her dollhouse play:*

**"Once upon a time, there was a dog, my pet, who was barking for food on Halloween. The dog wanted to have lots of sweets. She went trick or treating from house to house to get sweets. When she went home, the dog showed her mother, 'Look mama, I have lots of sweets.' Mama said, 'Do not eat them all or your teeth will go bad.' The end."**

*A Dijimon character comes strolling onto the stage. It is Kobbie, who says,*

**"Once there was a Scalgreymon, a Dijimon friend. The Dijimon had bats all over his horns. He did not know what to do. Scalgreymon scared all the bats away. The end."**

*Leah, in her bumble bee outfit offers:*  
**"One day my brother and I went to our grandmother's house. Our cousin Snooty went with us too. We played with**

**Grandma's dog 'Zoe.'** The dog saw a ghost and jumped on my shirt. I fell down."

*Jessica arrives in her princess costume and sings her story:*

**"A witch flew on her broom I saw  
She smiled I saw  
She waved I saw  
She fell I saw.  
The end."**

*One after another, the children come forward wearing their elaborate, colorful, and individual costumes, skipping, hopping, acting, and being. The actor-children stand in the middle of the stage performing their roles and telling their tales while the music in the background adds another welcome element to the breathtaking ceremony. The children leave the stage giggling, roaring, and scaring the audience. It reminds me of Shakespeare words in "As You Like It."*

**"All the world's a stage,  
and all the men and women merely players,  
they all have their exits and entrances.  
And one man in his time plays many parts..."**

*Once the children have told their Halloween tales, the chairs are placed around the big rectangular table where we*

Watching and listening to the young children's captivating involvement inspires me. Their stories, and the willingness to share them seem to deliver a message:  
"Look at us,  
moving step by step-  
we are together.  
Come help, and put your hand in mine  
and let's make  
the whole world shine."  
I wonder if it will mean anything to teachers outside the daycare.

*will feast and listen to their recorded stories. The children's parents have contributed food, as has Mrs. Paly. I believe many memories were made at this wonderful Halloween party.*

**Everyone celebrates Christmas and Hanuka. Where is my Holy, Diwali, and Eid!**

Once the Halloween season has ended, the center launches into preparations for the next calendar theme. The month is November and the teachers and children have started to plan and rehearse for the annual Christmas event. The children respond well to the teachers' implementation of the new daily program. For the entire month, children from all three programs practice Christmas songs, and most of the children are selected to participate in a play depicting the birth of Jesus Christ.

Though it crosses my mind to ask my colleagues why they would choose to focus on only one winter celebration (and risk offending many parents) I do not probe into this sensitive issue. I follow their coming theme with a clear commitment to respect what is taking place inside the children center.

*Questions begin to come to mind as to what the assumptions are behind all the earnest celebrations taking place. If society is not to emphasize religious codes, then why only celebrate one religion's festivities?*

Other facts begin to appear. During rehearsal, some children fidget and whisper, and their obscure murmurs gain the director's attention. She says, "The ones not singing should remember that Santa will be here to give presents and if you do not sing, then ...!"

*For myself, I never took part in my school's Christmas concerts, but instead sat in the audience. I want to understand what happens to children's thinking in these situations. How do they feel if they are not from a Christian culture?*

As the month of December arrives, the daycare receives a Christmas tree from the Church. It is set up in the middle of the center hall and decorated with bright ornaments and angel figures. Candles and presents wrapped in Christmas paper surround it.

Besides the children's artwork displayed on the bulletin boards, the daycare ceiling is decorated to look like "childrensnetworkart.com." I cannot forget those beautiful moments when the children shared with me about the special dresses they were to wear at the Christmas concert. Each child has to wear a costume. Some of these are made by mothers, aunts or grandmas. Some are from the child's native country, and some are bought at a local store.

It is December 18<sup>th</sup> and the center director has already issued the newsletter with the schedule for the Christmas concert. During free-play learning-time, the children sit around a table preparing Christmas cards for their parents and some begin to talk:

**Jardeep says, "I have a new clothes, mein kapre Holy te paye see, aythey holy nayan honde."**

**He looks at me and asks, "Teacher no holy?"***(People from India celebrate their cultural festival.)*

**Jashua replies, "It is Christmas time."**

**Tauseef and Kimberly join the table.**

**Tauseef reports, "My mommy has made a new dress for Eid and I'am going to wear new clothes and bangles on Eid."**

**It is then that I realize exactly what the children are asking:**

**Where is my Holy, Diwali, and Eid?**

*I feel as if the children have responded to my silent queries and it is clear to me that the children do feel a difference and assimilate it through their natural way of thinking.*

It is December 20<sup>th</sup>, and the concert is scheduled for 7:00 p.m. The day is spent making final preparations and performing a dress rehearsal in the Church auditorium for the first and only time.

Imagine it's the year 2001, and the second edition of Creative Teaching in Early Childhood Education, a resource book, has been published. It is a wonderful book, with in-depth information on annual celebrations. Emphasis is given to celebrations like Christmas and Hanuka, but no information is provided on other visible minority festivals like Diwali, Holy and Eid. I hope this omission is not intentional, and that it will be corrected in the next edition.

### Interior of the Church

As children and adults enter through the carved wooden door, eyes follow the pathway between the rows of pews, with wooden, cushioned chairs, and elongated wooden tables.

In the middle of the right side of the Church hall stand wooden paneling on the walls forms an artistic stage area

with a piano, huge green plants and paintings illustrating scenes of Jesus's Nativity, Jesus's Last Supper and Jesus's crucifixion.

On a wooden wall panel hangs the Canadian flag and on the stage, five microphones are fixed at different spots for the children to come and recite.

A Christmas tree dazzles with lights and elaborate decorations to the extreme right of the stage.

As the children start to perform, all is calm and quiet

I can still remember my own school church. It was similar in décor to the one I am sitting in now at the daycare center. I can feel the same serenity and peaceful atmosphere as I felt in the churches of London, England.

I witness children acting and listen to their songs;

The variety in cultures and different age groups

all synchronize in Christmas incantations.

These inspirational moments revive my childhood days of school

where Christian friends perform

and other children watch as spectators.

I experience present and past at the same time

and while feeling the reverie of the event, I hear teacher Neha

commenting on the historical happenings that are taken from the Bible.

I remember that Hanuka has just been celebrated

and Christmas is here, I am fasting

as it is the month of Ramadan and another Holy event is on its way.

The background music creates a serene atmosphere in which I feel myself

surrounded with invincible thoughts:

*I am enamoured with spirituality,  
breathing, and compelling  
to experience and practice  
to forgive and to forget;  
to remember the past and begin a new  
kindness, gentleness and patience  
with my folks and loved ones  
on this Island  
leaving our differences  
and  
to value love, respect and humanity  
to listen and be listened  
to share with another  
the goodness of being good.*

Zoobi (December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000).

*I have come to believe that if we adults do not look deeply into the individual and collective imagination of children, it will be difficult to establish connections with them. The classroom that has never tried to create its own story has not delved beneath the surface where the real living takes place. It is the fantasies of the child which form the basis of his or her culture; this is where we adults could search for a common ground. I think most adults have forgotten how to do this, and I think children do it best of all. They have much to re-teach us. Within the context of classroom teaching, the search for common ground requires a readiness to face up to one's own shortcomings as a teacher. It requires a willingness to change, which means actively seeking new ways of doing things and consciously accepting and adopting new attitudes and new outlooks to replace the old. It requires courage.*

*Remarkably, each child's story and play is a unique event in the history of the daycare. Each begins his or her story-telling career in a way neither I nor anyone else has ever heard before. Not only do we learn about each child's current state of mind, but we also get ideas for new directions to pursue, and new ways to meet the interests and the concerns of the child.*

## **COLLECTIVE TALKING: THE NEED TO KNOW AND CHANGE**

*Hearing and understanding the points of view of others is in itself a monumentally challenging process, especially when crossing boundaries and working beyond them. Most people are apprehensive about approaching these discussions, and show considerable anxiety. I feel fortunate to be surrounded by colleagues who are willing to share their deepening interests in an effort to create supportive environments for children. It is becoming clearer than ever to me that these childcare teachers work under severe limitations which make their jobs difficult, and at times impossible. Despite this, they show a keen desire throughout their informal interviews to grasp information on children from different cultures. They continually discuss why and how to help children who are linguistically and culturally-isolated.*

*I know that multicultural education is not simply an idea or a perspective, but through the collaborative talking process, I have come to believe that most of the teachers recognize, and have accepted the children's differences. Their attitudes and practices show not only their willingness to work with these children, but at the same time, reveal the teachers' earnest need to identify and define the challenges they face.*



My earlier discussions have walked through the spaces and tensions that teachers live with on a daily basis. My collective talking session with the teachers is to inquire into pedagogy, with the focus of further understanding what is missing. I also wish to know their opinion on how my presence has affected their work. Has it been a hindrance to their daily schedules? But most importantly, I need to meet with the teachers as a group to express my gratitude to them for leading me on an incredible journey of discovery, based on their lives and their work.

These viable conversations provide knowledge that is crucial for all who work with and rear young children. I have come to believe that collective talking is useful in uncovering the meaningful, but hidden thinking in those whose voices speak with such passion about teaching young children with kindness, love and acceptance.

Having this group conversation is an opportunity for each of us to listen to and know the perceptions of the others and to discuss the needed changes that are seldom talked about. There are defiant looks occasionally, but no one uses any hurtful language, and no one gets angry. The course of our discussion leads us to the issues of change and the need for knowledge and definition in their daily work. I believe it is worth documenting and I think their

*praxis in the childcare center makes possible a construction of meaning in conjunction with the struggles they go through. The teachers have never before been encouraged to tell, retell, or rethink their experience of being in a state of knowing.*

*It is almost noon, and I have invited my colleagues to lunch. With my home economics expertise, I set a formal dining table and the teachers have the opportunity to select various Pakistani foods from a buffet I have prepared. I try to ensure that everyone is comfortable so we can talk informally. Throughout my stay at the center, I notice that when I speak with these teachers, the discussions turn towards my personal experience; I ask them similar questions which lead to spontaneous conversations. I provide in the following pages, the collective stories and individual reflections of teachers on the topics of knowledge and change.*

### **Cultural knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy**

For a childcare teacher, knowledge of other cultures does not mean just being able to repeat one or two words in a student's first language, nor is it simply to celebrate a cultural festival or prepare food related to their culture. Many childcare facilities opt to celebrate multicultural week by asking children to wear their ethnic clothing. To acknowledge and respect multiculturalism is to be able to understand and apply this knowledge to everyday classroom activities. The teachers agree that early childhood

curriculum guidelines are deficient, as they do not meet the needs of culturally diverse children. The teachers again stress the need for changes to be made in early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. Each teacher reveals her need to connect with the children and their cultures:

**Natasha:** "I would like to learn about the children's cultures from someone who was born and raised in that setting, and who could give me first-hand descriptions. If this were the case, I might be better able to deal with these children, and they would respond better to the teachers."

**Laura:** "It is difficult to understand all the cultures, but helping children individually according to the way they've been brought up will surely help me understand. For example, I often simply tell the children to do a certain activity because I know that choices are difficult for them. In my childhood I was never given choices, but was told to do."

**Greti:** "Knowing about a particular culture is useful and serves as a guideline, but it does not mean I can know everything. I have to try to sense how to help a child in a particular situation, using tolerance, respect, energy, and commitment."

**Mrs. Paly:** "I know through experience that it is important to understand each child's culture and to work with the children at their level of understanding. I think if we teachers work with each child as an individual person, using love and honesty in making a connection with the child, then we are performing our job honestly, and taking it to be a sacred profession. Working with children is a

serious matter and adults who work with young ones should be mature in their thinking and have respect for everyone."

**Neha:** "I would certainly like to know more about culture and multicultural education. Though I do know what it means, my basic knowledge is not sufficient when I have to work with these children for more than seven hours a day. I would like to know what is important to the children's parents, what the children already know, and how to build on that foundation of knowledge. This is important to me as a childcare worker because I know that each culture values their children's education. In order to respect these values, we as teachers need to know them."

**Suzana:** "Knowing the children's cultures may help us to understand the children better, but what I would like to know is how to apply that knowledge. Learning about culture is important, but at the same time, learning from the parents would be better for building trust and communication channels where they are so desperately needed. I personally need to learn how to better communicate with parents."

*In the reflections cited above, the teachers share the same desire to learn more about cultural understanding and experience. However, cultural knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy take time, and cannot be gained by simply taking a diploma course. They require effort, and individual acceptance of children who do not share the same background. The fact that the center teachers already possess these requirements is encouraging. Although it certainly takes more work, developing a strong identification with students from different cultures is possible.*

## **Child-rearing patterns**

*Child-rearing is a common link among culture, language and learning. A child's home is their first context of learning and teaching. The earliest, and most significant socialization of children takes place within their families and communities. The manner in which each family raises its offspring is based on tightly framed norms, values, and customs within their particular cultural contexts. For example, just as they learn to walk and talk, children also learn how to live and grow within their particular traditional domain. In the same way, children's interactions with their parents formulate a pattern that the young ones try to replicate when placed under the care of childcare workers. This is where students' cultural values and behaviors should fit with childcare policies and practices. Learning can take place in a positive manner, but if a mismatch occurs, learning may be experienced in a negative way. As mentioned earlier, most of my colleagues have shown a desire to know more about the child-rearing practices that take place in various families. Here is what they have to say:*

Greti: "I have very little information on culture. All that I know is what they eat. For example, Chinese food, Indian roti or daal, but nothing in detail about their language, what their parents expect from them, the way parents talk and how their children reply to them, their customs, living arrangements, or their relationships.

I don't have a broad knowledge about their cultures and this makes me feel limited in knowing about the children I teach."

**Laura:** "I certainly think children get raised differently. The way parents talk with their children is different from the way we as childcare teachers talk to them. If the children get confused in the daycare, what can we do? If we knew how the children were raised, we would be better able to understand why they behave the way they do. With this knowledge, I as a teacher could then deal with the child in a manner they could understand, and then gradually help the child to realize the norms of the daycare."

**Natasha:** "In our childhood days there was always a connection between home and school, and the learning process was a success. I feel that this connection has been weakened or lost for children coming from different cultures, and this makes their adjustment and learning more challenging. Learning about child-rearing is important because it helps teachers know how to deal with the children. Many a time we as teachers struggle with how to communicate with children who are new and have no experience with English."

**Neha:** "I have a slightly different view from my colleagues. I think that if we deal with children in a direct way and clearly tell them what to do, they will surely understand. You see, there is the direct way of dealing with children, the way you and I and every other person was brought up in, and the indirect way, which is taught in early childhood education courses. But I deal differently with different

children. Children who understand decision-making get to make choices, but when I find that decision-making isn't working, for example with a Punjabi-speaking child, then I have to give clear and firm directions. Still, I know that children are brought up differently in different cultures and I would like to know more about that."

**Mrs. Paly:** "Some of our daycare children come from broken families, some are adopted or are from single-parent families, and some are from extended families. There are differences not only in the structures of their families but also in the way they are raised. I am not sure how the parents in these different family structures raise their children. All I know is that it really influences the children's behavior at the daycare."

**Suzana:** "I have no knowledge of the child-rearing practices of other cultures, how children reply to their parents, how parents deal with the children in difficult situations. At our daycare I find the children from Chinese and Punjabi cultures to be very close to their aunts and uncles. I like that. I want to learn more about how the interactions between parents and children take place in other cultures."

*These statements by the childcare teachers prompt me to share my experience of learning on this subject during my graduate studies in Pakistan. I remember taking courses like 'Childhood in Contemporary Cultures,' 'Human Development,' and 'Nursery School and Exceptional Children.' Of these courses, Childhood in Contemporary Cultures taught exactly what these teachers wish to learn. But I wonder if a university or diploma course would be sufficient in truly deepening their understanding. In my experience, a course may not provide all*

*the knowledge they require. A course could certainly teach about the external manifestations of culture, which could then provide the stepping stones for further comprehension and learning, but it may not represent the culture as understood by the people who actually live it. In my view, child-rearing practices and learning means knowing all the learning styles employed by different cultural groups for their children. In such circumstances, teachers will have to develop teaching skills which reflect all the different learning styles of children. It's a real challenge. The question is, are all early childhood educators ready to comply with this criterion?*

### **Enriching differences**

*Acceptance and awareness of other cultures is easier when there are children from several different backgrounds in the same classroom. If children from the mainstream culture are the majority, then the teaching of cultural awareness becomes extremely difficult for teachers. In such scenarios, children find it difficult to identify how diversity relates to them, because they have all been raised in basically the same way. I have felt and observed that the childcare teachers in the daycare are accepting of children's differences, and are helping them to adjust to the daycare environment by applying their early childhood education knowledge and the ideas they think are suitable to fulfill the children's needs. They believe that this kind of approach smooths the child's transition from home to daycare. All the teachers have opinions about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in terms of how they treat the children. Some of the teachers share their opinions during the group session:*



**Laura:** "As I am from a different culture myself, I know how these children feel. When I came to Canada I knew nothing of this society and its values, or how to deal with adults in a different country. I was shy and had very little grasp of the English language. I cried alone, seeking help from God. I believe it is my moral duty to help children adjust at the daycare. I know the strangeness one feels. I understand that the children will be different, and are different, from one another; therefore, I accept those differences as being cultural, not as something bad or lacking."

**Neha:** "I think every human being is different and we need to respect that difference. Learning about one another's culture means gaining from it. The children themselves have a lot of cultural information, like language, the value of respecting elders, and talking with gestures, that we, as teachers, can learn from."

**Natasha:** "My goal is to make a difference in the child's life by accepting them the way they are. I do listen to them, even though I don't always understand what they're saying, because responding to their needs at that time is very dear to me. In my view, a childcare teacher will make a difference if she knows how to deal with a child regardless of which culture the child comes from. It's all about the teacher's attitude. If we learn to see and overcome our own prejudices, only then can we be helpful to the children."

Greti: "It is extremely difficult for me when some children are unresponsive in group discussions. We talk about the differences and similarities between people, like hair color, skin color, praying, eating, and talking. I'm frustrated by the child who listens but does not talk, because I don't know how to handle that child. I try to help that child to make friends with children who can talk in her or his first language, but that approach sometimes fails as well."

Suzana: "As a white person, I have always tried to relate to parents and children from other ethnic backgrounds by ignoring the differences and focusing on what we have in common. But as I said earlier, I feel that my communication skills are limited so I have difficulty discussing these issues."

#### **Learning experience: My presence in the daycare**

*As a group, the teachers share their experiences of working with me throughout my research. Each teacher offers her view of my inquiry into early childhood curriculum. In the daycare classroom, the teachers care for and teach children from diverse cultures in ways that are based on early childhood curriculum and their own ideas as to what they think is appropriate to meet the needs of the children. Here are their comments:*

**Suzana:** "I think your presence in the daycare was helpful because we were able to share our ideas with you, and your questions about ECE really made us think. You are the first person to ask us what we think about ECE and as a result, there are things that I now want to ask those ECE instructors. During my ECE diploma program I was careful in the practicum because I was being evaluated and assessed by the ECE instructor. With you it was like working with

another colleague. I never felt that you were assessing me. Rather you made me talk about ECE in ways that helped me to think of my teaching and the way I do things."

**Laura:** "Working with you was insightful. You weren't scary at all for me, and you gave me a lot of support on my ideas. An example was during the Multicultural Week celebrations and we planned the artwork together and decided to make different face masks with the children. It was neat. Everyone enjoyed making the masks out of paper mache and now the children are continuing their work, putting hair and other features on their masks. I was able to talk with you about many things that never came up while doing my course work, but have since become issues in the classroom. I liked your presence. I could always talk to you about the things in ECE that bothered me. Discussing ECE with you was like going through another courses. You helped me to think about ECE and about my own methods and their results. It was learning experience for both of us, you and me."

**Natasha:** "I think your making me think about ECE has refreshed my knowledge, and I am now able to think more clearly about its application in our everyday practice. Before you came, I had always thought we were missing something because ECE never worked with our daycare children. But I never thought that it was because the children's cultures were different from the ECE theories that we were practicing in the classroom. Your presence has helped us to think about

and envision a working plan. This knowledge is helpful, but I'm also annoyed that we were not taught these things in our ECE courses. I liked the way you worked on your project. You helped us in many different ways. You asked us about our home countries, our family background, and our education. No one has ever asked me these questions before, nor have I thought about them. Having you here was a learning experience. You made us talk, look at our work, and try to sort things out with our colleagues."

**Greti:** "Working with you has benefited both of us. You got to know about my background and private life, and I came to know the reality that I always felt, but never mentioned to my colleagues because I thought the difficulty I was having with ECE was my failure to understand. It never occurred to me that it could be something else. Analyzing ECE with you made me realize that we teachers were not only using an ECE approach but also applying the director's philosophy."

**Neha:** "I enjoyed working with you. I was not frightened, because you never frightened me. Rather, I learned that you are a patient woman, who was there to watch everyone at the daycare and help us to think and talk about ECE. Through our discussions I realized that I find it hard to come to the level of the child, and now want to learn how to do that."

**Mrs. Paly:** "Well, I always thought of you as a teacher working on her research project. In my original country, teachers are people who get the most respect, and in the same token, you are a woman who has earned great respect from the community. You have watched my teachers and me and the way we work with every child. I always felt your presence at our center to be friendly."

*After illustrating their reactions to my presence at the daycare, the teachers move into a discussion of the difficulties of writing observations on each child's learning. Some teachers elucidate that as I am a researcher and an outsider, they find that my presence works well with their practice. They tell me that the way I have made them talk about early childhood education has refreshed their knowledge and stimulated a desire to learn more. Some of them now wish to take courses on diversity. Most admit that they are so occupied with the children at the daycare that they hardly get any time to think about and work on alternative learning strategies. A few of them relate that they do research their daily plans and that the extra effort benefits the children in their classes.*

#### **Recipe for becoming active learners**

*During our collective discussion session, the teachers are able to compare experiences, point out each other's misconceptions or flaws, and find and give support for personal changes and political actions. The following discussion on active learning evolved out of the earlier theme of 'learning experience.' The collective discussion moves to a debate on how teachers can become researchers. In my view, active learners are teachers willing to observe, record, and reflect on their classroom pedagogy to make changes, if the need arises. Some of them have made it clear that they have no time for research and therefore remain quiet while the other staff members express their opinions:*

**Natasha:** "To become researchers, I think teachers need time to talk and plan and to work together. This is what we are doing at the daycare. We try to find out if something is not working with the children, where the error lies, and how to work it out. But I think we should be given more time so we can do this in a more

professional manner. Maybe it would work better if there were more staff at the daycare, then each teacher could have some time to reflect on their teaching and their children."

**Laura:** "To become an active learner, one has to be dedicated to it on a personal level, but it's a struggle to work on several different areas when there is so much other daycare work to be done in so little time. I think each person could become a researcher if the administration showed more appreciation for our work and gave us more paid time to prepare our lessons and materials. I do not know if a raise in salary would motivate us to react in that way."

**Suzana:** "I certainly think a lot of it depends on the relationship between teachers and administration. If there is a positive attitude towards the staff, appreciation for what they do, and a recognition that time is needed to prepare good lessons, then teachers would most likely put their hearts and souls into teaching and learning."

Greti: "Discussing ECE with you made me dig into my course notes again, and now when I plan my daily activities I really try to see what will work well for different children. We teachers have also talked about the ways we deal with children and whether our methods work or not. We often change the daycare environment, bringing in different toys and equipment, and rearranging the learning centers. But still I say that to truly become active learners many things have to be changed. Our field needs to get more respect, a higher salary, and more time to prepare and reflect on our teaching."

*One of the critical issues that comes up is preparation time. I find I can relate to what they say, for I too have experienced full work days followed by evenings of preparation at home. It requires extra energy, a lot of time and a concerted effort. I can understand each teacher's point of view, but I also think that if we have the will to work towards accomplishing a goal, then we can do it. Support from our colleagues and the center director can help in this endeavor. If there is uniformity in a teacher's perspective then there will be a strong determination to achieve that goal. There is no doubt that childcare teachers have a clear understanding of this issue and the reality surrounding it. It is good to know that every teacher understands what a teacher/researcher is and what is expected of a teacher to become an active learner. Though some of them refrain from discussing the issue, the others express themselves without any inhibitions. I personally appreciate and feel indebted to them for their hard work with the culturally diverse children at the daycare.*

#### **Building bridges to accommodate**

*As I talk with my colleagues, I glimpse the loving daycare environment they provide, in which students and their individual interests are treated with dignity. It is an environment the young children see as exciting. Being able to communicate with their teachers in their own ways means a lot to the children. Despite suffering from temporary parental separation, the children love coming to the daycare because a loving atmosphere awaits them there. I am able to describe the daycare environment in such a way because the teachers who work there are committed to providing it. Children often become attached to teachers*

*who not only speak to them in a gentle and kind manner, but also make an effort to understand them, and accommodate their likes and dislikes. Here are the teachers' opinions on the matter:*

**Greti:** "I need to connect with the children. I think of myself as a bridge, with one of my arms representing the child and the other representing the daycare. So it is my interaction with the child and with the school that I focus on. The children are smart. They know how I feel about them and in turn they give me love in the form of hugs and kisses, and in the way they approach and talk to me. I feel extremely flattered when I see the way they pretend to act like me as a teacher. I love that, for it boosts my enthusiasm and influences my work. I love and enjoy working with these children, making the classroom a place that focuses on their interests. I know their minds are taking in every move I make, so my every action should be an encouraging and welcoming gesture for them."

**Natasha:** "In my case, I try to accommodate each child by understanding them. I know the difficulties parents are faced with, and when they put their children in our daycare it is because they trust us. It becomes our ethical responsibility to provide children with a comfortable, loving place that has interesting activities for them to work on. Take Tiffany for example. She comes at 6:30 every morning and her parent wants me to give her breakfast at that time. In that way, I know and understand the situation, and work accordingly. We teachers try to create an environment where children can enjoy themselves and have fun. In creating this environment, we take into consideration both ECE and teacher-oriented techniques, and the needs of the children. We refer to this multiple-technique approach as "working between cultures." Just as we teachers understand the



children, so do the children understand us. They often ask for a particular teacher when in need of something, because they know who will respond to them."

**Mrs. Paly:** "As the director of the center, my tension comes from licensing agencies, parents, and the daily running of the daycare—but if I dwelled on these things I wouldn't be able to do my job. My priority is the children, therefore I treat the children, and the parents and teachers, the way I myself would like to be treated. I have several children here who are from immigrant families and are having problems either at home, or adjusting to the daycare environment. I believe that we are all human beings and if we all make use of our gifts, then life will be better for everybody. After God, the most important thing in my life is my work. My goal with the activities is to make the children's life comfortable at the center."

*I think these ideas shared by the teachers are genuine and useful. While they tell us little about specific curricula, these ideas speak volumes about the teachers' values, beliefs and concerns about children. These thoughts generate a valuable discussion on how the teachers practice their work, what they do, and why they adopt different styles in their teaching methods and in the materials they use to accommodate children's needs. Are other childcare teachers doing this? I hope they are. With these conversations and queries in mind, I would suggest to early childhood educators and to my readers that these ideas are not strange. It just takes some courage to initiate such collaborative talking within their classrooms or children centers. I think that these teachers offer a humane direction for the present and the future; ideas that we can carry with confidence*

*and dignity between different cultures. Listening to the teachers' desire to see some change in the early childhood education curricular norms and to learn more on cultural diversity has left me thinking about the struggles and challenges I encountered over my years of teaching in different contexts. As I listen to the teachers, I can visualize all those moments in the past when I had thought to change but felt powerless to do so.*

*I am forced to wrap up the 'Baitak' (an Urdu word meaning "talking together") as the children have begun to wake up in the nap rooms and are returning to the daycare class. I thank the adults at the daycare for their support and for sharing their very own lived and living experiences with me.*

## **LIVING LIVES IN COMPLEXITY: UNFOLDING THEIR PRACTICE**

*Over the course of my critical inquiry process, I discovered and have presented certain complexities in the teaching lives of my inspirational colleagues, whom Canandians call childcare workers and whom many other countries refer to as child-minders. The term child-minders has never been appropriate in my mind, as what these workers do is far more complex than just child-minding. The more I learn about these childcare teachers' identities and their teaching practices, the more I recognize my responsibility to write my account of them fairly and not to be judgmental. The necessity to interpret what I have observed creates in me an attitude of permanent openness towards others, and also generates a feeling which reminds me that I have to describe their praxis using their own voices, and let them speak for themselves. I must state that most of their classroom teachings have already been discussed in the previous chapters under the headings of 'Fieldnotes' and 'My Notes.' The following chapter includes my observations of teachers' tensions in their practice, and their feedback on my interpretations.*

These female voices speak of the importance of different truths in defining and empowering the self and sustaining the human community. To understand teaching as a dialogic relation is to see that much in the profession can be contradictory; there is no one-way of dealing with children. Indeed, it is the multiplicity inherent in so many areas of teaching that results in the tensions found within and among teachers. Individual needs and interpretations are expressed, evaluated, and internalized, adding to the pressure that so many teachers feel.

I have come to acknowledge and accept these childcare teachers' practices as a complex dynamic caught between the teacher-oriented and developmentally appropriate frameworks for action, and encapsulated in the world of early childhood teaching. However, this does not negate the impact of other factors that contribute to shaping practice, examples being their long experiences of schooling and parenting and their previous work with children. These prevailing truths about classroom practice carry with them the tensions, issues and challenges of educating children that I witness in the daycare classrooms.

I can now say with conviction that what matters most inside the children center are the intentions and goals

behind the teachers' pedagogy. What happens when the students are used to a teacher-centered practice and the teacher wants to construct a developmentally appropriate practice? What happens when the practice becomes a mixture of both frameworks? How about when a teacher with a teacher-centered approach enters a setting where developmental appropriateness is valued, or vice versa? These are the questions I discuss with each teacher regarding their individual practice.

Each teacher must deal with the very real external constraints imposed upon her practice. Each teacher manages group processes, makes materials accessible, and shepherds the children through their routines. Each teacher engages in a plan or pattern of action, for they are the foundation of the teaching world. I think these stories of the practices of childcare teachers will help to remove the solitude in which teachers of culturally-diverse children work, and will reveal the burdens and problems of early childhood education, as well as its benefits. For each teacher, there is a brief section acknowledging the complexity that she herself recognizes in her teaching.

#### **Individual feedback on childcare teachers' practice**

**Laura:** *Originally from the Philippines, Laura cares for twenty-four children, aged two to five years. She works from 9:00 to 5:30 with the same co-workers, Natasha and Mrs.*

*Paly. She began teaching daycare five years ago, and since then has completed a 10-month training program in early childhood education. She constructs her activities based mainly on the developmentally appropriate approach, but Laura also values and follows the teacher-centered approach in her work at the daycare. Her teaching shows that she integrates the two different frameworks in the classroom, which means she is "working between cultures." I see her tensions resulting from being pulled in two opposite directions. As I observe Greti, Neha and Natasha, and as I go through the excerpts that we share, I recognize that there are other times when I can see them visibly struggling with the conflicting developmentally appropriate practice approach and teacher-centered practices. Even though there are other conflicting demands brought about by the multiple agenda, these situations do not cause nearly the same degree of tension as the methodology battle the teachers simply use their own common sense to prioritize.*

*The dilemma for Laura during craft time is whether a child-initiated or a teacher-directed process should predominate. One morning, Laura presents the children with small circles of colored tissue to glue to the background of an apple. Her expectations of what the children should do with these materials suggests both an acceptance of a child's process and a concern that the children follow her directions. She has corrected a few children on how to glue, and told them to use only one color of tissue. On reading my observation excerpts her eyes open wide and she says:*

*"That's me. I think I wanted them to choose from different colored crumpled tissues and then glue them on the precut apple shape in the right color. It's difficult to use the developmentally appropriate practice approach with children from different cultures. I have to keep*

directing them, otherwise they sit back. Yes, I was finding it tense to decide whether to simply leave it to the children, but since I had to get all the children to do their artwork in that time frame so they would have something to bring home to their parents, I had to show them."

*Correcting the children during craft time, Laura makes the decision in this instance to act in one particular way. In this case, the outcome she has selected takes on a greater priority for her than the child's process, so she uses teacher-direction to alter it. This tension occurs numerous times in Laura's craft and group activities when she feels that the children have to wait for some time before they become engaged in the activity. Her tension appears to be a seesaw, moving back and forth with each teaching approach appearing equally preferred in her talk and actions. I should not fail to mention that as Laura thinks of providing individual materials for each child, as she does in craft activities, she also values children's control over their own actions. Sometimes she provides children with a choice of process, and so appears to lean in the direction of developmentally appropriate practice. This implicit belief emerges in her tendency to give children small amounts of choice in group time, for example, choosing a craft project or a book, choosing to recite a nursery rhyme or to report how they feel that particular day, and also giving choices in problem solving.*

*It seems the two frameworks, developmentally appropriate practice and teacher-oriented approach, both offer specific guidelines regarding action. The approach each teacher adopts implies a lot about their values and understanding of children, and their*

ways of enacting these in practice. For Laura, these competing forms of knowledge reflect how the world works. This idea concurs with Polanyi's (1958)<sup>30</sup> thoughts.

The tension between the two frameworks for action in her work processes, which Laura acknowledges, does not affect the climate of her classroom. For example, Laura's correction of children is so polite and respectful, that while I am with them, there are no conflicts between teacher and child.

Regarding time, Laura says: **"There's so much to do that we've always got something left over."** She tries to work simultaneously on several different tasks at the daycare, which proves difficult for her, even though she hardly shares in any administration work. On Laura's feedback paper, she argues for the developmentally appropriate practice's value of following a child's lead, yet she sees herself as doing the opposite. Despite this, she is satisfied with what she is doing well with the children. Although Laura is familiar with lesson planning and the observation of children, she cannot integrate these desired aspects in to her practice because of work load, limited time, and meager pay. However, Laura's teaching practice shows that she is being thorough in

***Endnotes:** It seems very unfair that Laura always ends up doing more chores than any other staff member. The worst are the afternoons. With the influx of kindergarten children, the daycare number exceeds more than 24 children with only two adults. She conveys her distress with such comments as, "There's so much to be done and I can't relax anymore. There are so many children in the room and I have to watch them all." She feels she has to finish all her different jobs before she leaves at 4:00 p.m. She becomes mute and works like a robot inside the daycare as the other staff member takes the children outside to play.*

<sup>30</sup> Polanyi, in 1958 claimed that, "when we accept a certain set of pre-suppositions and use them as our interpretive framework we may dwell in them as we do in our own body. Their uncritical acceptance for the time being consists in a process of assimilation by which we identify ourselves with them. As they are themselves our ultimate framework, they are essentially inarticulable." p. 60.



applying two early childhood education approaches, controlling the children when they get noisy, and coping with the difficulty in conducting her desired practice with culturally-diverse children.

**Natasha:** Though she is familiar with developmentally appropriate practice, Natasha's work is very much built upon the teacher-orientation approach. She considers free-play to be a spare period in which to accomplish her teacher/supervisor tasks. I determine that during free-play and while problem solving, she gives children choices. Describing her practical knowledge and soliciting her reactions is a surprise for both of us when I approach her for feedback during the middle of my research. Her surprise springs from my portrayal of her, for she thinks she is much more child-centered than her practice indicates.

Natasha has completed a four-year university program and holds a Bachelor of Education degree in psychology. After working in a family daycare, she came to the children center and completed the early childhood education training program. Natasha begins her day by opening the center at 6:30 a.m. Children of different ages arrive to join the program every day, so I see Natasha managing children between the ages of two-and-a-half to ten, a changing cast of players from day to day. Most children are part-time, but there are many full-time students as well. I feel like I'm at a carnival whenever I visit the daycare— people coming and going, the environment noisy and crowded. Natasha has to do drop offs and pick ups from various school locations. Sometimes in the mornings she

conducts a 'preschool' if the teacher does not show up. Natasha's partners, Laura and Greti have to set up and manage the daycare area.

Natasha's elaborate program involves planning the activity centers based on weekly themes. For each of her groups she sets aside time for artwork, circle time, and learning activities using a teacher-directed approach. Other activities like songs, story-books, and free-play, are based on developmentally appropriate practice in which the children are given the opportunity to choose. Her mornings are busy, with duties including greeting and talking to children and their parents, listening for incoming phone calls and taking messages, in the book, placing lunch boxes in the fridge, monitoring the craft table or doing free-crafts with those who choose it, and also dealing with the arrival of parents. It is during the other staff members' circle time that she will run to do the photocopying for the other teachers or for all three of the programs at the center. The need to attend to maintenance and administration duties keeps her from getting more closely involved in the children's play. She interjects here: **"That's right. I've got so many things to plan sometimes, which isn't good but it's necessary, that I do take time away from the kids in the morning to get a few things done. There is always enough staff to handle them."**

Natasha's responsibilities, including monitoring, supervising, center maintenance and administrative duties, lesson planning and preparation for future activities, all prevent active attention to the observable play activity of the children. This absence during free-play occurs in spite of, or in contradiction to, her valuing of play, and her sensitivity to it as developmentally appropriate.

Although Natasha's practice is primarily teacher-oriented and she does not always attend to the children's play, she nevertheless supports the individual child's needs and interests in her teaching. I observe that the children seem to prefer Natasha's or Greti's assistance in solving their problems. But if the children require help in the washroom or at lunch, they usually approach Laura during the daytime.

Throughout Natasha's interviews, she talks about the constraints in her work that prominently appear in her practice. Natasha's area is well-equipped and well-designed and she is given whatever resources she asks for, but it is clear that she suffers many more difficulties in her work than the other teachers. As center supervisor, Natasha feels the added pressure of having to be compliant to the orders issued by Mrs. Paly, for every day there are instructions on new tasks to be completed. Natasha acknowledges that she is receptive to this position regardless of the fact that it causes burgeoning pressure in her work and keeps her on her toes from 6:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. She admits my descriptions are accurate, but at the same time mentions that she views herself as being more geared towards developmentally appropriate practice than I have observed. She believes that this approach is applied in her practice by giving children the choices of different activities even though she finds that it does not work well with many children. She also mentions, "I really want to get involved in their play, but I'm always somewhere else...either gone to pick up the kids or receiving phone calls, when what I actually want is to play with the kids."

.Greti: Greti was an elementary teacher in Poland and also had prior experience in early childhood education in Canada before coming to this daycare center. Greti is normally scheduled to work from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. When Natasha goes on her winter vacation, some of her job assignments are transferred to Greti, like opening the daycare in the mornings. As she is one of the most experienced teachers with whom I have worked, Greti's practice is quite difficult to discuss. Parts of her teaching practice are based on developmentally appropriate practice, while other parts are teacher-oriented. Greti's colleagues consider her program very effective, but she and I have different views on the parts of her practice where she is in conflict with the two frameworks. My argument is that she relies more on the teacher-centered approach. She disagrees, saying that play and the developmental approach are favored and implemented in her class. With one of her groups, consisting of six children, two of which are special needs, she applies developmental theories in the classroom. Later she joins the daycare classroom, overflowing with children, some of whom are from single-parent homes and some from working-class immigrant parents struggling to survive in a new country. The director tells me that these parents have found that the developmentally appropriate practice, or child-centered, approach is not working with their children.

During the month of December, 2000, Greti comes up with a new agenda including structured activities that Mrs. Paly wishes the teachers to pursue. Greti believes that children require some sense of who is in charge in order to respond to adults in a focused way.

Greti works with two colleagues in the morning and when all 28 children are present, they divide the children into three groups. Both Laura and Greti cope with large numbers of children at various times during the day. No matter how many adults are present, keeping track of events in the room is extremely taxing for teachers. Greti's multiple agenda while Natasha is away includes monitoring the indoor and outdoor play, conducting circle time and preparing the crafts, dealing with parents and doing pick ups and drop offs of children. Besides doing the problem-solving activities with the children, she also attends to the

students at the craft table. She has a firm rein on the classroom, but she also grants the children a lot of freedom.

What is abundantly clear to me is that Greti applies the teacher-centered approach to her work and is consciously attempting to change her image and practice. I now provide an example of how her approach is beginning to shift from teacher-directed to child-centered. In the first example, Greti tells the children to perform the process exactly the way she instructs, to achieve the desired outcome:

"Take it down, swirl the wool and bring it up around the precut red poppy flower. Oh my, you did it exactly the way I told you to. Excellent."

Later, during another art activity, Greti struggles to decide whether her idea should prevail or the children's. There is a precut shape of a pumpkin with googly eyes, a different shape for the nose, and a different shape and size for the mouth. She initially stands before them and starts giving a demonstration, when suddenly, as if she has realized something, she stops. "Okay," Greti says, "let's see what you think your pumpkin should look like."

As she reads this excerpt she states, "Or maybe sometimes you're doing crafts and have something in mind, and the children have something totally different in mind, and that's all right. If they're not going to do it my way, then that's fine too. That's the way they want to do it. Though I have changed, and now think that children should have fun doing stuff their own way, I'll still help them if they look like they need it. And when I find some children not thinking for themselves but copying what other students are doing, I get upset. I work hard preparing my activities and I want my students to show some effort as well."

Greti is realizing that her tension arises when she tries to apply an activity and feels herself caught between two different approaches. She says, "Its hard to know which one will work in that moment." There is tension between her criteria for success and the children's reactions to her crafts. Greti explains that

teacher-direction is the best method to use with children, as the developmentally appropriate practice approach is difficult to apply with them. Her goal is to change the activities, to make them shorter and quicker so they require less investment of time from the children. This reduction is meant not only for the craft table, but also for the writing skills, as she desires the children to play more. All the teachers with whom I work believe that play provides children with important learning for their development. Greti comments as follows:

“They learn how to share. They learn a lot of language, a lot of role-playing, and cooperation. They learn hand-eye coordination. They learn all of this from play.”

Greti's concern for the children and willingness to accept them as they are, and her implicit awareness of developmental appropriateness, are present in her teaching repertoire. They are brought to the forefront of her practice in the moments when no other pressing need arises out of her teacher-centered thinking.

**Mrs. Paly:** The director is the second most experienced childcare teacher at the daycare with whom I work. Mrs. Paly was an elementary teacher in Sri-Lanka, and in Canada she has been working with young children for more than twelve years. I find Mrs. Paly's practice to be mostly teacher-centered, while still encompassing some parts of developmentally appropriate practice. She always talks positively about Montessorian skills being effective in learning, but as developmentally appropriate practice approach is the main framework of training in childcare legislation, she respects it and acknowledges its benefits. Mrs. Paly will not usually hire a teacher who has not taken an early childhood training program, and if she does hire an unlicensed teacher, the new employee must register in an early childhood education program within the first three months of employment at the center. She has no fixed schedule at the daycare, but always stays for

at least four hours a day. She tries to schedule her working hours for the times when there are more part-time children at the daycare, or when the number of children exceeds 34, as it does in the late afternoons. She works mostly in the evenings in the daycare classroom or stays in her office doing administrative work with occasional visits to the daycare.

Mrs. Paly is a talker. Full of vitality, and down to earth, she always finds something to talk about with the children. To describe her teaching style,

*Many families in her center suffer economic difficulties like unemployment, and some are on social assistance. The children of some of these families display low tolerance levels for frustration. She provides food to some daycare children.*

I will outline the actions that encapsulate her values in practice. Mrs. Paly tries to provide the children with choices and positive experiences in all of her daycare programs. During free time, she exerts as little control as possible. She believes that this will encourage the development of independence and self-esteem in the children. The only requirement of an activity is that it be constructive so that children do not hurt themselves or damage things in the room. She believes in observing this child-initiated process with limited learning centers, and then focusing the center's activities to meet the children's needs and interests through play.

In her role as a teacher, I find Mrs. Paly actively involved in the activities of the children. She spends most of her time interacting with the children and asking, "What are you guys playing?" She encourages the confident children to invite the shy or quiet ones to join in their play. As she stops to chat with some of the children, many others crowd around her. She joins in activities like building with blocks, and works alongside the children. It should be noted that wherever she goes, the children follow. Mrs. Paly believes that children should frequently be given choices in all areas of the daycare

setting with as little teacher direction and control as possible. The routine aspects of her day are permeated with a sense of taking the time to interact with the children and to take notice of their interests.

One important aspect of Mrs. Paly's practical knowledge is her attitude towards the families of the children in her daycare. She actively draws parents into her program and shows interest in the family life of the children. In fact, she does all she can to build connections between the home life of the children and their life in the classroom.

**Neha:** Neha is a part-time teacher. She usually starts her work at 2:00 in the afternoon but is sometimes asked to come in the morning when there are more children in the daycare. Neha is originally from India and is in the process of getting her early childhood education training program. In addition to planning, preparing, and teaching, Neha's duties include cleaning, and picking up four children from elementary school. She is known for having a loud voice.

The sources of her early childhood education knowledge are self-study and the advice of her colleagues. She is locked into the teacher-centered approach for action. While she is familiar with the term "developmentally appropriate practice", she has a limited understanding of developmentally appropriate practice and teacher-directed approaches. This lack of knowledge creates tension in her teaching practice. After reading about the tensions I observed in her practice, Neha responds:

"I'm just following in the other teachers' footsteps. That's the way we do it in the daycare. We have free-play, a circle and then a structured learning activity. When I started here I found that that's how everyone else was doing it."



Neha prefers giving choice when it comes to free-play activities. She keeps her areas as open as possible and offers choices, but controls the children's behavior during group activities. She blames this authoritative approach on things like time constraints. She accepts my constructive criticism, as she has not yet gained first-hand early childhood education training and is therefore unable to follow early childhood education guidelines.

Neha is of the opinion that she plans her activities based on the children's interests and in response to their needs. Her intentions about her teaching are clear in this regard. The children enjoy her craft activities because they include a wide variety of materials, like paints, brushes, and clay, and are always fun. Neha is not bothered by mess and enjoys cleaning up afterwards with the children. She addresses the children individually, frequently acknowledging their feelings or reactions in any given situation. When conflicts arise, she employs problem-solving strategies with the children, and helps them brainstorm possible solutions. The children enjoy working with her.

**Suzana:** Suzana was born in Canada and is originally from Ontario. She runs her classes using developmentally appropriate practice. She has a clear allegiance to this single framework for action and is trying to alter her practice to reflect some teacher-oriented strategies. The tensions she suffers are between her desired image of her practice, and the reality before her. She completed her early childhood education training program two years ago and

has been true to the developmentally appropriate practice approach since then.

Suzana cares for twenty children between the ages of three and nine, and works the same hours as Neha. Suzana has the extra responsibility of doing two afternoon pick ups and both she and Neha have the job of closing the center every day. Many of her children's families are unemployed, on social assistance, or headed by single parents. Her group includes several challenging students who display low tolerance levels for frustration, and who have frequent temper tantrums. Suzana is quieter than the other teachers, but she is full of vitality, tolerant of mess, and will always find room on her lap for the youngest children. She talks openly about her childhood days and is sensitive about being a single mom, for she does want the ideas about children of single-parents extending to her son. She feels she knows little about children even though she has completed her early childhood education diploma. Her goal is to continue learning about child development.

Suzana's program has legitimized the value of prioritizing developmentally appropriate practice. In all contexts of her classroom, children are given choices. Her physical presence in the classroom is to stand by quietly and observe, but she will always help a child if when assistance is required. Her tension can be found in her difficulty in constructing a child-centered approach with her classroom children. She has a keen desire to provide different materials for each child, but many of her students become

confused and struggle with the materials, which in turn creates problems in her classroom. She mentions in her interview that she has discussed this with the center director, who suggested experimenting with a more structured approach. She has no training in structured teaching, and no knowledge of how to do it.

Suzana wishes that her work as a member of the daycare team was more acknowledged and feels that any changes in the rules and regulations of the daycare should be shared more openly than they presently are. Greti and Neha share this concern. Suzana talks about multiple constraints in her practice including resources, time, and pay. She feels at odds with the other staff members, who are working between two frameworks. In her attempts to provide a practice she values, she explicitly favors a more developmental approach than is practiced by the other staff at the children center.

*My feedback to the individual teachers about their practice is my attempt to ensure that their first experience with a participant observer is a positive one. These teachers have had the courage to share their practical knowledge with me and to allow me to witness their struggle to construct a valued practice that is appropriate for their daycare children; they deserve just as much openness from me.*

*Based on their early childhood education training and teaching experience in the field, Natasha, Laura, Greti,*

Mrs. Paly, and Suzana all have an understanding of the criteria characterizing the developmentally appropriate practice approach, and the features missing from it. While working with these women, I find that each has a sense of herself as an educated teacher in practice, and an identity as a human being. These are not necessarily the same, but are continuously being negotiating in various contexts. The teacher's identity completely becomes entangled in the frameworks and approaches that she lives through her practice. The teachers themselves can be viewed as sites of conflict in their words reflect one teaching framework, and their actions reflect another, or both.<sup>31</sup>

These teachers have selected a model which combines developmentally appropriate practice along with their teacher-centered practice, but many components of this model are still under construction. The teachers' experiences with children, the way they structure time and space, their corrections of the children's actions, and their use of an open-ended approach are components that are slowly coming together to support their teaching agenda. Though they face tension and challenges in their teaching practice as the result of their chosen model, it is what

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<sup>31</sup> Britzman (1991) argued, that teaching was dialogic: Produced because of social interaction, subject to negotiation, consent, and circumstances, inscribed with power and desire, and always in the process of becoming, these dialogic relations determine the very texture of teaching and the possibilities it opens.

their practical knowledge tells them is the most suitable for culturally diverse children.

I think this teaching model adds a particularly dynamic quality to the daycare program. I see the program feels as opening up and opening out; breathing room is made for the activities children and adults think of doing. Even correction does not appear to be restrictive, as it involves helping the children. During observations, these teachers never use discipline as a way to punish, or as a weapon in occasional power struggles with students. These teachers look at correcting a child's behavior as an opportunity to teach, which in turn strengthens the center's philosophy that the classroom is a safe place to learn, to make mistakes, and to grow.

In watching these teachers, the most interesting phenomenon I discover is that some of them are able to make two important observations. The first is the children's actions as they work with different materials, and the second is the way the children are able to express their ideas through the use of those materials. For example, during craft time, the children are making collages using different colored lentils. Jardeep relates that his mother cooks daal [lentils] for him for lunch. Laura overhears Jardeep and discusses his comments with another staff

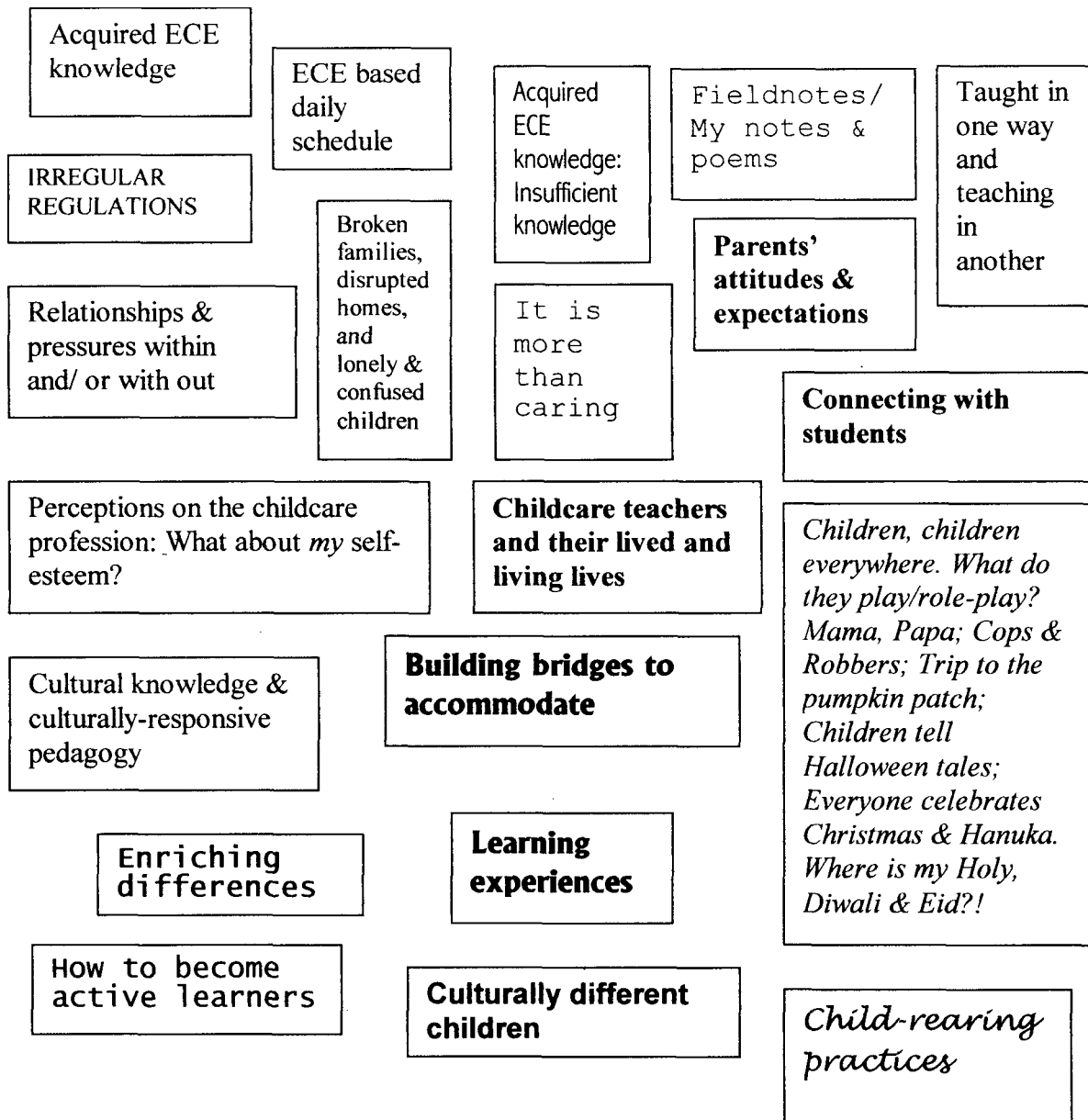
member. I see that all the teachers are open to having conversations with children. None of the teachers feels uncomfortable having the children talk to them about whatever is on the child's mind. These teachers have established trust and credibility with the children, which encourages one-to-one conversations.

I also wish to return to the teacher's declaration of caring, and commitment to their work, briefly discussing the value behind it. Their responses are heartwarming, and I feel that their experience of giving and receiving care is a virtue, that leads to a caring perspective. This perspective is then included in the moral stance that is valued by many of these teachers as part of their lives. It is my conviction that the practice of teaching with care and commitment plants a seed from which the endless garden of a caring community can grow. In researching, writing about, and feeling this essential ingredient for children's development, the question becomes, "Are all teachers caring? And in caring what are the disruptions and barriers?"

With the capacity to feel and view the world from someone else's perspective, these childcare teachers are working with problem-solving and child development from a community orientation. What this suggests is that we need

to write about the teachers' struggles to construct developmentally appropriate practice in an effort to bring it to the public's attention, and to bring it out into the open as something important to be discussed, debated and reflected on by the teachers themselves. My feedback to them and the teachers' feedback to my presence reinforced my confidence. I am thankful to their contributions that have alerted me as an early childhood educator.

## A Patchwork of Themes





## **MY PILGRIMAGE TO THE CHILDREN'S PARADISE**

Those who read this story of my living and learning experience may discover it similar to their own, or different, depending on who they are, what they wonder about, and where they look for answers to their questions. My plan has been not to simply report on my on going research, but rather to share what it means to me. As I look back on it now, as a teacher inquirer, I see that the driving force behind my journey with and through the children center, was the yearning to learn, and the energy that curiosity brings to me.

To carry out my curiosity, I traveled as a pilgrim, looking for teachers' conception of early childhood education curriculum. I wondered if they looked at the early childhood education norms as being applicable or not applicable to children from different cultures. I wanted to clarify my understandings about actions and events in the classroom.

It was clear at the time that I required more skills and methodological rigor to acquire the capacity to handle these queries, and so all the greater was my exactitude in approaching the children context of my curiosity. In this sense, what was really important for me was to gain

knowledge on what the mode of the inquiry process should be and what its limitations were.

After researching and performing ethnographic fieldwork, and portraiture for more than six months, I can claim with confidence that ethnography is an illuminating experience. It has afforded me the opportunity to make use of my self, and to take a closer look at understanding what is happening in my life and in the lives of others.

This ethnography and portraiture provides me with more than just insight into the culture of the children center, it has revealed information about the teachers and children's activities in their own words, which would not have been possible through conventional experimentation or survey designs. I confess that in order to develop a

**Geertz and other ethnographic scholars ask, "Why do ethnographic fieldwork?" I claim that my ethnographic case study along with portraiture provides me with the opportunity to give my readers a detailed description of the daycare, including an understanding of its context, the characteristics of its childcare teachers, the nature of the community in which it is located, and the situation under study for an extended period of time in its natural setting. I think that my epistemology of ethnography and art-aesthetics surely resonates with them.**

rapport with my informants, I employed a strategy.

My plan was to enter their sphere through the gateway of knowing the children, and then to use my role as an assistant teacher and an observer to explore the complex and conflicting experiences in the teachers' lives.

I write my autobiography, giving personal reflections and other personal and family information. Inclusive are the biographies of childcare teachers to interweave the relational aspects of attitudes and beliefs to their living experiences.

I feel it is my ethical responsibility to respect my informants and help them realize that they have knowledge to share. In my need to motivate and challenge the teachers to speak and reply, I decide to expose my own life experiences to them. My intention is to give the teachers the opportunity to speak. My respect for them is as fundamental to me as my respect for myself. The ability to listen patiently and critically has always been one of my strengths, and now, at the heart of the experience, it has become a norm in my learning phase.

My mission begins enthusiastically in the early morning hours with my boarding of an express bus to Broadway station. I transfer to the Skytrain, get off at Surrey Central, and then wait for another bus. It will take

me from the West end of Vancouver to the other end, in South East. During my commute, I come across diverse groups of people. I witness their behavior patterns, and hear a wide variety of accents as they speak English: their first, second, or third language. Nearly every teenager and adult student wears earphones, isolating themselves with their music, yet playing it so loud that they still share it with their temporary neighbors. As I move from one landscape to another I carry with me many stories I can relate to. I am eager to reach my destination, where I will be received with warm welcomes by little angels.

On my arrival, the children run to say hello, offering a hug or a smile. These enticing gestures make my day. The way the staff communicates and cooperates with me shows that I am accepted and honored.

Living with them as an assistant teacher and an observer, my role is to watch and listen attentively to how the childcare teachers do what they do and how they deal with the complex problems of teaching children from diverse ethnic backgrounds. My work as an ethnographer and portraitist involves watching, listening, conversing, recording, and interpreting, in addition to dealing with site logistics, and facing ethical and political dilemmas. I must try to deal with all of these tasks throughout the

day. It is an intensely personal and social process that requires physical and intellectual stamina, political acumen, and moral sensitivity.

I am able to cultivate friendly relationships with my informants while in this role but must disengage myself from any social activity that does not involve the children or is outside the daycare setting. I do not attend any social engagements that are not scheduled in the monthly agenda of the center or that are not linked with the children. Acting as a witness, I document the teacher-child interactions and take note of people's lived realities occurring inside the daycare.

I initiate conversations with six childcare teachers to gather their biographical information, and conduct open-ended interviews to elicit their conceptions about early childhood education. This enables me to gain insight into possible influences on their thoughts, on their opinions of what is missing in DAP, and on their tensions, issues, and challenges. I record the daily occurrences that relate to the social interactions taking place amongst the children and teachers in the context of the children center. I work with each teacher for a total of nine days over a period of three weeks. My role in the classroom ranges from assistant teacher to complete observer. The latter role is adopted

when the children are having lunch or napping, and during these times I document the descriptions of all that I have accumulated in my memory banks. I record daily the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, and motivations of the situations I observe taking place around me.

Each time I interview an informant, I record it and take side notes. Throughout the interviews, I listen and record attentively, trying to gain access to the teacher's perspective. I have two forty-minute interview sessions with each informant; one at the beginning of my work with that informant and the other scheduled to take place on my last day with her. A collective group meeting is held at the end of the learning process.

Besides my empirical findings, what I have learnt through my inquiry is that there are important differences in the ways in which I have learned. The criteria for learning from childcare teachers are informative, but rigorous. To truly understand teaching, one must do more than simply ask teachers for their opinions. One must first have a foundation of knowledge to work from, and then the researcher must spend countless hours watching teachers in action, taking notice of their classroom setting, their materials and approaches, and the nature, age(s), and

culture(s) of their students. And of course one must talk with teachers at all stages of the research process. During this learning experience, the phenomena that emerge and are impossible to ignore are the issues that relate directly to the children: namely, how the actions of children are influenced by the adults who care for them and the atmosphere of their surroundings. Even though these issues are only indirectly associated with my project, I take note of them, as I believe them to be equally important to my other observations.

On my way back home every evening, I review my recordings and reflect on what I have experienced throughout the day. Then, as I walk through my front door tired but elated, I transform into my cherished roles of mother, wife, and student.

I try to stay organized, keeping track of my field notes and transcribing the interviews right after they have taken place. Once I have transcribed the informant's information, however, my mind starts churning like a fully loaded washing machine, trying to disengage all the important matter embedded in the fabric of her words.

**A colleague of mine asks, "Are you finished with your inquiry analysis? How was it?"**

**I tell Ali that coding the gathered information is a tedious and exasperating job. I had not been thrilled about the new innovative technology of computer-based analysis, for I felt more comfortable doing it manually. I had to deal with each participant's transcribed notes and field notes, breaking them down into smaller, more manageable sections, and giving them first descriptive names and later, metaphors. After finding that many of the descriptive names were analogous across the informants' information, the metaphors were then taken from the problem areas and the literature on early childhood education and culture. Though metaphors were given to most of the information segments, I found that my informants were speaking in metaphors as I proceeded through the information. I found that a pattern of codes emerged in the information I received via open-ended interviews and field notes. I had several small, colored Post-it Notes that I used to label the metaphors and descriptive names throughout the accumulated information, and this system made my manual work successful.**

*I find that the end of an individual enquiry is no time for rest. As I finish my research with one teacher and prepare to move on to the next, I am reminded that my success in this endeavor depends on my forging ahead with an alert mind and soul.*

*The systematically gathered accounts of my informants require great thought and interpretation on my part as I decipher the meaning within. In chapters three, four, five and six I have managed to create meaningful metaphors linking my observations to the teachers' own accounts of the tensions, issues, and challenges they face in working with children from diverse cultures.*



Shortly after beginning my research, I undertook a daily recording of 'Field Notes' in an effort to chronicle the exciting things going on around me that might or might not directly relate to my topic of study, and my reactions to those events. The comments I share under the subheading of 'My Notes' refer to my potential bias. Readers will find that my 'End Notes' reveal my personal reflections.

My desire to gather information from practicing childcare teachers leads me on a pilgrimage to the children center, and results in an ethnography of minute details. While I do not intend to write about all the confirmable aspects of my enquiry, I will gladly discuss them when questioned. My intention with this work is to provide for my readers a basic understanding of the roots of the tensions, concerns, issues, and challenges in

**Endnotes:** *The daycare was not a paradise in the literal meaning, but a place of caring and learning. It is like "Bachon ke daikh bhal aur Taleem o Tarbeath ki jagha": a place that I believe has the sanctity of a paradise. It is run by teachers who have the openness of mind and heart to allow them to face reality and collectively work out ways to move beyond the imposed boundaries. The daycare, with all its limitations, is bursting with potential and possibilities. Is the daycare staff up to the challenge?*

the pedagogy of childcare teachers. From my experience at the center, I have learned to expect serendipitous events when they are least expected. My discoveries at the daycare center awaken precious moments in my life long since put to

rest. These moments come to me not as images remembered, but as peripheral visions that deepen my understanding of the social actions taking place around me, and heighten my learning process.

Once the information is broken down into smaller segments, coded, given metaphors, and attached to the analogous thoughts of the teachers, I start to feel the pressure of having a flood of information to wade through.

Then there is the dilemma of how to present this information to my readers. My instincts tell me to remain focused on my primary question and to remain true to the nature of my investigation. To add to my worries, the feminist-bee has started buzzing in my ear, reminding me to represent literally the individual voices and multiple visions reflecting the childcare teachers' ways of life, attitudes, practices, and beliefs. These voices and visions are to become our contribution to the knowledge of early childhood education. Our contribution is vital, therefore I attempt to produce an ethnography that is descriptive, original, creative and authentic. But how, and to whom, do I tell it?

"Who are my readers?" I ask myself. Staying true to what I have already mentioned in the prologue, I still identify my audience as each individual directly or

indirectly associated with the field of early childhood education. Relating the authentic and varied stories of my informants in their own voices has been my objective all along. This is my challenge hearing their voices that have been silent and hidden. It is ethnography that brings me close to the childcare teachers. What is missing in building bridges between theory and practice is listening to teachers' voices. And I hear them.

Wading through the rivers of data, I think of the trust that has been invested in me by my informants, and it is not the pressure of work that I feel, but how to translate the meaning that I have gleaned through the learning process. Even when I try to relax, my mind remains occupied with the teachers' concerns. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I begin to meditate about the structure of my journey, and my hand automatically reaches out for the diary I keep by my pillow to jot down the fresh flow of ideas flashing in the dark.

Listening to the childcare teachers' voices leaves me feeling intoxicated. I am so immersed in their words that their names spring out in my thoughts and I

see myself talking with them in my mind. I wonder how I can lessen the female bias inherent in my study, but at the

**It has been my journey of inquiry with six childcare teachers and I claim it is not coming from all early childhood educators.**

same time I feel obligated to respond to the women's experience by representing it as it is spoken. I have begun to envision a comprehensive dissertation of authentic lived and living stories of early childcare teachers involving events, thoughts, feelings and re-imagined memoirs brought to life on its pages. The lived and living narratives of these teachers have been described in depth in the earlier chapters. I suggest relating to them as:

*Living in a new world,  
thinking and rethinking an old one,  
and experiencing,  
at different levels of life,  
pressures  
to take either or  
work between cultures;  
or  
take both.  
With adjustment or transition  
rediscovering who they are,  
What they want  
and  
how to accomplish their aspirations;  
Re-examining their differences from  
the white culture  
of language, ethnicity, origin, religion,  
traditions  
and  
the influence of these differences  
on childcare and education,  
on their personal and professional responsibilities;  
Taking into consideration the other  
and making a difference in that other,  
is a commitment for them.  
They enter into and become a part of the other*

*negotiating  
and bearing the difficult moments.*

What I have presented in this thesis can be used as a succinct source of teachers' knowledge for any childcare worker seeking for guidance or reassurance. Creating true portraits of my informants and their stories was a real challenge. The task turned out to be much more complicated than I had originally imagined.

Throughout the course of my enquiry, I have nurtured my vision, and worked towards its realization carefully, one building block at a time. I have experimented with non-traditional forms of presentation, and have been pleased with the result. In this way, I have been able to complete this manuscript.

What started as an adventure on the road of learning has become an educational pilgrimage. I must mention that my childcare informants and I agree that the learning experience is valuable for teachers and researchers alike, and should remain ongoing for both groups. I have learned that anyone who chooses to conduct similar research in the future should possess common sense, fine sensitivities, shrewdness, patience, flexibility and the ability to handle tension with grace.

## EPILOGUE

*When I started my journey of discovery with the childcare teachers, I wanted to understand what their tensions were when applying the DAP approach in a culturally diverse daycare center, and the issues and challenges surrounding their teaching practice. Now that I am at the end of this inquiry process, it has become clearer than ever to me that we teachers work under severe limitations, and teaching is much more conflicted and complex than I had previously realized. In my years as an early childhood educator, I had previously thought that I could transform practice by merely injecting a theory into it. As I spoke with the teachers however, I felt reconnected, and learnt that practice cannot be achieved within the frameworks of philosophy because practice exceeds theory's grasp. This learning process has shown me just how deficient the praxis of early childhood education in North America is in meeting the diverse needs of children. This is the reality even for knowledgeable and extensively trained teachers like my informants in the daycare. The women acknowledge the difficulties they face but remain committed to their work, for the growth and development of the children is their primary concern.*

What I discover from the teachers is that they face great tensions when they use the developmentally appropriate practice approach with culturally different children, and that they find themselves caught in the conflict of trying to applying both developmentally appropriate practice and teacher-directed approaches.

I discover a variety of influences that might impact a teacher's thinking, examples being the varied cultures of the daycare children and the individual life histories of the teachers. But these teachers also possess a sense of contribution to their teaching which reminds me of the 'practice makes practice' claims by Britzman (1991). Their personal values seem to emerge as a source of direction in their teaching, but also appear to contribute to some of the conflict between their conceptualizations of early childhood curriculum and their classroom practice. Children from several ethnic backgrounds attend this daycare in which the context is set according to the norms of the early childhood education environment. In view of my teaching experience with

*What many notable scholars and policy makers do not acknowledge is that there is critical literature that interrogates the very nature of what they consider important for the children from age 0 to eight years. Such reluctance in considering children's culture has lead many early childhood educators perplexed regarding theories of child development. If the developmentally appropriate practice approach is sensitive to the issues related to a child's culture, then where is it to be found? It is not available for teachers in ECE teacher training programs.*

children and my thesis, I find that the developmentally appropriate practice approach has less sensitivity towards child's culture.

These teachers all have distinctly different personalities, and blending the two different early childhood education approaches in their daily work is their way of taking ownership of their practice. All six teachers value a child-initiated, child-centered and teacher-supported developmentally appropriate practice approach and want to implement it, but they also recognize the disconnection between the developmentally appropriate practice approach and the children at the daycare. I find the pedagogical practices of these childcare teachers to be reciprocal-where children learn from teachers and teachers learn from children. The wisdom of this practice can be seen in their recognition, and acknowledgement of the needs of culturally diverse children. Though these childcare teachers may appear to be following early childhood education norms with teacher-direction, they are warm, spontaneous and passionately

**Endnotes:** It is the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2001 and I have recently begun reading a book on 'Authentic Childhood', published in 2000. The book focuses on Reggio Emilia's philosophies in the classroom. Reading this book legitimizes what I have discovered through my learning process. One of the characteristics of the programs in Reggio Emilia preschool is the way practice reflects the beliefs and values of young children and teachers.



involved. They use cooperative learning or small group strategies, or a combination of both, and they allow their students to have fun. They understand the difficulties young children face and do all they can to accommodate their needs.

With generosity and spirit, the teachers help the children adjust, and introduce them to the differences and similarities they see in the people around them.

*Can teachers working with young children take on the initiative of helping children adjust to new learning environments that are different from the children's home cultures?*

In addition to coping with pressures on every front, these teachers are working to earn from the community the appreciation they so overwhelmingly deserve. These courageous women are committed to their work, and their openness in caring for the well-being of their students is their contribution to their profession.

All of my informants understand the child-centered approach and have a thorough knowledge of its content. They have consciously chosen, however, to adopt and integrate another framework into their practice which they feel is more suitable in meeting the needs of their daycare children. The conscious, active and cooperative nature of this decision-making process has made them active learners.

**My study has become a proactive ethnography.**

It is my conviction that multicultural education should be embraced by early childhood education curriculum content and the instructional strategies used in schools. Multicultural education, emphasizing cultural diversity is vital to interactions between teachers, children and parents, and is essential to the way child centers conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning by focusing on knowledge, reflection, and action as the basis for social change. We must also make special efforts to encourage families to take part in their children's care and education for parental involvement is crucial to a child's success.

Early childhood education curriculum content in North America is based on a culture free zone by ignoring an essential ingredient in the development of a child.

I therefore urge all childcare centers to create a defined "common place" on the premises where the parents, grandparents, and guardians of children can come together to meet, discuss, share their stories, and learn the connection between home and school.

Although my thirst for knowledge from these childcare teachers engaged me for more than six months, I think another valuable route of inquiry would be to conduct follow-up research for an even longer period of time. Future early childhood researchers must conduct their studies in the daycare settings, for it is to this environment that childcare teachers bring their cultural histories, diverse ideas, working values, and ways of addressing the issues of childcare that must proliferate in the field of early childhood education. This team of open and caring childcare teachers provides a working model for other daycares that serve children from diverse backgrounds. These childcare teachers should also weave their tapestry like mine with passion, patience and perseverance. Hence, I view myself as a pilgrim on an ongoing journey whose goal is to recover on a massive level the issues and visions of early childhood educators everywhere.

As I pick up the different color threads to weave and find that I am not alone in my learning journey, but am accompanied by children and teachers. I invite those, early childhood educational policy-makers, who write early childhood education guidelines, formulate early childhood

education courses and who do workshops, to join in my  
weaving-to knit challenges and tensions together with hope.

*how gracefully we all blossom  
in this world of fecund creation,  
our mosaic of such diversity  
is soon giving off perfume  
that we spread, stretch and  
smile together as one kin  
and on this earth,  
angels with little bugles  
sound sweet paeans  
of endless variety,  
and in multiple voices  
our heart sing  
to this music  
of a happy continuum.....*

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