

2022/2023

# Shaking the Movers: Early Childhood

Early Learning at MacEwan



*elm* Early Learning  
at MacEwan

 **MacEwan**  
UNIVERSITY



Landon Pearson Resource Centre  
for the Study of Childhood  
and Children's Rights

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# Acknowledgements

MacEwan University is located within Treaty 6 Territory and within the Metis homelands and Metis Nation of Alberta Region 4. We acknowledge our responsibility to care for community as it has been cared for on this land and in this gathering place by many First Nations people, such as the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) for generations.

We begin by offering our respect and observing the privilege we have to work, live, and play on these lands and recognize the historical trauma and victimization that has resulted from colonial practices. Through truth and reconciliation, may we find our way forward.

Thank you also to the children and families and educators from ELM who engage and share with us every day. They place their trust in us when they bring their children and we cherish and honour the relationships that develop with them and their children through the time we spend together. Our ongoing work to deepen and show the significance of what it means to be early childhood professionals, is a continual "search for meaning that only the children can help [us] find" (Rinaldi, 2006. p. 98).

We are grateful for the ongoing collaboration and support we receive from faculty and students in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies program. Together, we continue to learn, reflect, and practice in deep and innovative ways.

Flight Alberta's Early Learning and Framework has been a significant guide in our practice with young children and their families. These ideas brought forward in Flight serve to underpin our work, express our pedagogical commitments, and inspire renewal, growth, and transformation even during these challenging times.

We would like to acknowledge the partnership with The Muttart Foundation and The Landon Pearson Resource Centre work in collaboration to deeply consider what it means to uphold a rights-based childcare program.

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# Introduction

Shaking the Movers at MacEwan 2022/2023 took a dispersed approach. Happening over several events, we worked to make spaces for many members of our early childhood community to come together and explore children's rights. We embrace rights-based programming and thinking as an ongoing initiative and an aspect of our everyday interactions at Early Learning at MacEwan (ELM). Having multiple events throughout the year supported us in our continued thinking about rights as actions that we take in our relationships with children, families, educators, faculty, and students.

Building on our previous Shaking the Movers experiences, one of the goals we identified for STM: Early Childhood - ELM 2021 was a further collaboration to involve Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies (BECCS) students in the STM process. With this intention in mind, we began piloting different methods for engaging BECCS students in a variety of ways. Starting with an interactive panel with 4th-year students in the course ECCS440 Professional Practices: Ethics, Care, and Social Activism, we developed a framework to build off of for ongoing events. The STM event framework included:

- Engaging with children across ELM's 3 playrooms (Chickadee, Partridge, Hummingbird) in discussions and explorations about children's rights.
- Observing and documenting children's everyday enactments of daily interactions and practices through a children's rights lens;
- Curating a picture book library made available to educators and guest readers with messages relating to care, civic engagement, social justice, and rights relationships;
- Hosting panel discussions involving family members, BECCS students and faculty, and the ELM educator team regarding the interrelationship of care and rights;
- Professional development sessions for educators that investigated how caring practices at ELM support children's rights;

- Creating multimodal opportunities for family members to engage in children's rights conversations such as message posters, newsletters, daily conversations, and family events;
- A play possibilities lab led by BECCS students consisting of specially designed play provocations that invited ELM children into playful caring practices, as a way to explore the implementation of care and children's rights into everyday programming.

This report weaves together each event to create a tapestry of our STM exploration. It serves as an ongoing commitment to upholding children's rights as actionable aspects of our early childhood community.



## **Dedication to The Honourable Landon Pearson O.C.**

With admiration, we remember and celebrate The Honourable Landon Pearson O.C. Landon's unwavering commitment to children's rights and well-being changed the landscape for how children's rights are understood across Canada. Landon's passion and service for children everywhere has left a legacy. One in which continues to be felt today, not only in the lives of children and youth but also in the lives of the countless educators and advocates whom her work has inspired. We are committed to Landon's vision and will continue our work in creating a world fit for all children.

## **Shaking the Movers 2022" '*A World Fit For Us*' by The Honourable Landon Pearson O.C.**

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Twenty years ago this past May, Prime Ministers and Heads of State from all around the world gathered in New York to adopt a resolution entitled "A World Fit For Children." Attached to the resolution was a carefully drafted plan describing what this world should look like. At the same time as adult delegates were drafting this document, children and young people from the countries that were represented at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children met separately to create their own vision. The young people called their document "A World Fit For Us" because, as the two girls who were chosen to speak from the podium at the Special Session said, "A world fit for us is a world fit for everyone."

After this meeting in 2002, the UN as a whole made progress towards a world fit for children by making it a major priority for all of its activities. Most of its member countries (Canada was among the first) drew up national plans of action for implementation. As a result, the quality of children's lives improved everywhere, unevenly, perhaps, but all in the right direction. Today, alas, a combination of circumstances has put progress on hold and childhood everywhere is under threat.

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## "A world fit for us is a world fit for everyone."

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Do you think that you who are participants or youth facilitators at our Shaking the Movers workshops this year could work together to help kick-start the momentum the Special Session generated twenty years ago? After all, as young people told the UN delegates in 2002 quite firmly: "we are not the problem; we are the solution."

For the Shaking the Movers 2022 workshops, what we would like to do is to read over the 2002 "A World Fit For Us" document (it is quite short) and decide what is missing from it or what is no longer relevant. With the new challenges your generation is confronting in 2022 such as the climate crisis, the pandemic, the expanding digital universe and what appears to be growing discrimination of various kinds with its impact on children's rights to belonging and identity, we would invite you to redraft the original 2002 "A World Fit For Us" document that is relevant for young people in 2022.

The next step we would like you to consider at the Shaking the Mover workshop is to use your own experience to develop ideas and strategies that might address one or more of the issues that shout out to be addressed so that we can take these ideas forward to 'movers' and, together, hold them to account to take action.

We can't save the whole world but with this intergenerational effort, I think we can make it a little bit better for a new generation of children.

Landon Pearson  
August 2022

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# A World Fit For Children

A World Fit for Children (2002; 2008) declares care for every child. While the document focuses on survival, protection, growth and development, we have also interpreted it as considering the influence of care practices and pedagogies as being vital for all children. We are actively exploring the ways that care curriculum is braided into a children's rights approach. At MacEwan we have invited children, families, educators, students and faculty to critically examine the ways we can put children rights and an ethics of care into practice.

In a conversation that happened in the Chickadee Room, children declared that a world fit for them includes the following elements:

Playing<sup>1</sup>

Going outside to play<sup>2</sup>

Eating<sup>3</sup>

Looking at sunsets<sup>4</sup>

Sleep<sup>5</sup>

Snuggling<sup>6</sup>

Swimming and swimming lessons<sup>7</sup>

Reading books<sup>8</sup>

Drinking milk<sup>9</sup>

Exercise<sup>10</sup>

1 & 3 Bennett (4y2m), 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, & 9 London (5y5m), 1 Wyatt (4y8m), 3 Caleb (5y4m), 5 Will (4y0m), 7 Jessie (5y3m), 8 Zaraha (5y0m), 10 James (5y0m).

Children of all ages offer valuable insights  
and call us into action to make the world fit  
for them.

The following sections describe some of our experiences of our Shaking the Movers events, and how they are connected with the ideas in A World Fit for Us (2002: 2008). We have organized our report to share multiple perspectives over the span of two years.



## Children's Perspectives

Throughout the daily happenings within an ELM playroom, educators dedicated time and were attuned to wondering about care and care practices alongside children. Mindful open-ended provocations were designed to gain a sense of children's thoughts around care. The following are some transcriptions of what care means to children.

### Partridge Room

Jennifer: Can you tell me what you know about helping other people?

Milo (1y11m): Hepping other peepo?

Jennifer: How do you help other people?

Milo (1y11m): Dis -

Jennifer: How do you help them? If they fall down, how do you help them?

Milo (1y11m): Hug

Jennifer: You give them a hug. What else do you do?

Milo (1y11m): Do dis (gives Jennifer a book)

Jennifer: You read them a book? You're giving me a book



### Hummingbird Room

Mackenzie: (to another educator) Evelyn and Maeve want their water bottles...

Mia(3y7m): Evelyn - I got your water bottle!

Mackenzie: Evelyn! Mia got you your water bottle!

Children laughing

Mackenzie: Mia heard you say you wanted your water bottle and she brought it to you, Evelyn!



### Chickadee Room

Jennifer: What do you know about care?

Leila (5y1m): I have an idea!

Jennifer: What's your idea?

Leila(5y1m): When somebody gets hurt, you can offer them something nice to help them feel better.

Jennifer: Ah - that would be really caring, wouldn't it. Jessie - do you have an idea?

Jessie (4y9m): My dad makes me bekfass

Jennifer: Your dad makes you breakfast! That's how he shows you he cares.

Jessie(4y9m):...he makes me eggs.

Jennifer: He makes you eggs, oh! Do you like eggs? (Jessie nods) Oh.

Sounds like he knows what kinds of food you like, hey?

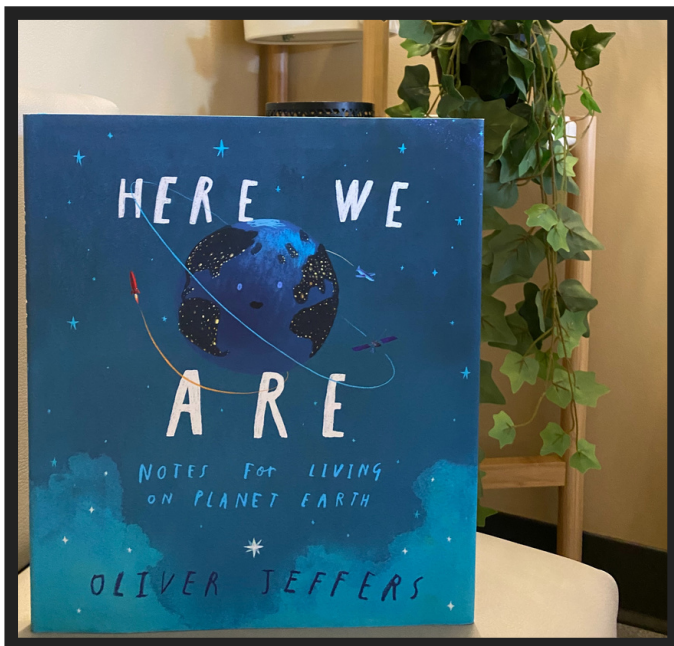


Children have valuable insights and knowledge into what it means to be active citizens of a community. These dialogues help us to understand their thinking.

This notion is eloquently illustrated in Flight, the Alberta Early Learning and Care Framework (Makovichuk et al., 2014), as evident in the following quote, inspired by Rinaldi (2006) of Reggio Emilia: "This understanding of each child as a citizen and as a strong, resourceful, and capable learner shifts the intention of our interactions from "doing to" a child toward "participating with" each child." (p. 39) ELM educators take this to heart and attune themselves to children's voices in their practice.

The following is an example of documentation done by Dawn Pearson, one of the educators in the Hummingbird Room, who used multimedia to explore children's ideas further.

We read parts of the story, Here We Are, Notes for Living on Planet Earth by Oliver Jeffers (2017) to start our team time. Once we reached the idea that we all live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada which is on Earth, we posed a question to the group.



Dawn asked, "What makes you feel happy in this world?" Children pondered for a few moments and looked around. After a few pauses and moments of silence, hands shot up towards the sky...children shared with each other the things that made the world feel happy. Numerous times children mentioned family, friends, stuffies, playing, and toys. To prepare for our next step, we took the list we compiled and printed images of the things the children shared.

Dawn says:

I listened to the way that Finn told me about his family and how he loves when his mom comes.

"I love when my Mom picks me up and takes me home,".

Together we found the picture for family and home and Finn worked to add those to the collage.

Lennon and Hajin felt connected to the toys that children mentioned, particularly blocks and magnets, while Luna and Alessia felt connected to the images of the stuffies. Evelyn shared about her stuffed giraffe that makes her happy and glued down a photo of a stuffy.



"The truest curriculum for our youngest children starts with respectful relationships, in the routines of care"

(Murray, 2021, p.24).

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Jen captured a moment from ELM's youngest citizens and noted how care amplifies and reverberates in environments where children are encouraged to acknowledge each other's caring in action. Slowing down and celebrating these simple yet profound moments creates tangible experiences of care for all involved. The moment is as follows:

Mateo holds out a book with an inviting expression on his face.

"Would you like me to read this book Mateo?" I ask

With a smile and a quiet "yes" I sit down on the floor and Mateo sits beside me.

Within seconds several children have gathered to listen to the story. At one point

Mateo sneezed. He looked up at me with slight concern, pointing to his nose.

I asked, "do you need a tissue?" He didn't respond.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Nila stand and slowly waddle away. I thought to myself she must be done with the story, only to be surprised several minutes later as she waddled back to the group, her hand stretched out grasping a paper towel. With as much careful precision as an 18 month old has, Nila navigates her way to Mateo and offers him the paper towel. Mateo accepts the paper towel with a questioning look as Nila crouches down in front of him and points at her nose, then his nose. Nila wasn't done with the story like I had thought, she was getting Mateo a tissue because he had sneezed.



Educators observed children participating in moments of care, citizenship and enacting rights. We were able to see the ways that caring and rights thinking reinforce each other and can naturally emerge from the daily routines of child care. When we pay attention to these types of interactions, we can see how they also emphasize the strong connections that exist in caring community.

# Intergenerational Collaboration

In winter 2022, BECCS students hosted a gathering with ELM educators, staff and family members. The conversation centred around exploring professional care practices and children's rights approaches. This laid the foundation for our dispersed approach for STM: Early Childhood this year.

This event was facilitated by BECCS faculty and the ELM educator team. Based on children's perspectives regarding care and children's rights, participants had an inspiring discussion about how care and rights are braided together in the daily routines and interactions at ELM.



## Nourishing care

Central to this discussion was Meena Jogadia, ELM's cook. Building off the Reggio Emilia model that recognizes everyone in the community as being responsible for the education of children, Meena holds a unique position that illustrates the interwovenness of care, children's rights and learning in our early childhood community. Meena prepares delicious food that feeds children daily. She further nourishes the community by sharing recipes, inviting family engagement in the kitchen, and helping with curriculum planning. Meena acknowledges the needs and personhood of every community member with her caring.

Her acts of care and connections weave strong bonds throughout the community. At ELM, the kitchen is the heart of the centre. Daily, we hear the pitter-patter of feet through the hall and then a sudden stop. We know precisely the spot; at the kitchen door. As Meena scoops with care, chops with vigour, and mixes with love, she pauses when each child arrives. "Good morning, Meena," there is a celebratory tone in how they speak her name. Soon a conversation ensues between the child's family members and Meena about a new stuffy or family vacation. Meena grants their stories her full attention, for if they have meaning to the child and family, they have meaning to her. These acts of care stay with children and families long past their days at ELM.



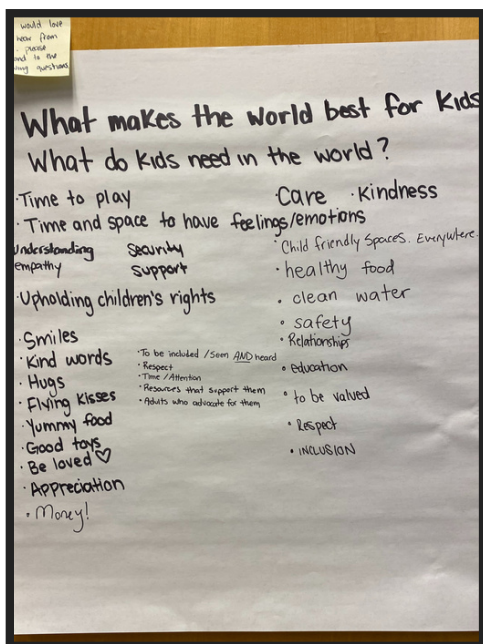
## Reading care and rights

ELM educators and BECCS faculty assembled a library of picture books focusing on issues related to caring, relationships, and civic engagement as a way to bring this year's STM focus into the playrooms. Available to ELM educators and guest readers, these books support ongoing conversations regarding aspects of everyday life that are important for children, as well as nurture conversations about the variety of experiences children have in different contexts.



## Family perspectives

We invited families to share their thoughts on a world fit for children. We hung a poster in the centre inviting people to jot down ideas in response to the following questions: What makes the world best for kids? What do kids need in the world??



It is clear from the generated ideas on the poster that family members identified both individual and structural elements that contribute to making the world fit for children. Mirroring the Adult Declaration in *A World Fit for Children* (2002; 2008), ELM family members also think that a key method for making sure that every child is cared for and has their rights upheld is by centering children as members of society and prioritizing them. This suggests a question - *A World Fit for Children* was written over 20 years ago. How far have we come in achieving the recommendations set out then?

Certainly some gains have been made in the last two decades, and at the same time we face increasing challenges in all domains of our society.

In ongoing conversations with families, it has become apparent that ELM's continuing explorations of caring pedagogies in relation to children's rights has been well received. Parents have commented about how they have become attuned to the ways that not only educators are caring for their children, but that the children are caring for each other, and educators are supporting other educators as well. The caring has also spread so that families are offering care to other families, developing the early childhood community in unexpected ways. Part of our interpretation of a world fit for children is building a community that cares.

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## Student perspectives

ECCS440 Professional Practices: Ethics, Caring and Social Activism students were invited to develop caring practice provocations in a play possibilities lab for ELM children, as a way to explore the relationship between children's rights and care.

First, the ELM educator team gathered examples of moments of care demonstrated by children, and shared them with the students in 440. Based on these observations, students worked in groups to design play provocations that would invite children to participate in caring practices. The students were innovative and developed six different possibilities - each full of play materials, related picture books, and friendly students who were more than happy to engage with the children as co-players.

Students transformed a classroom into a temporary playroom with their play possibilities. The provocations were an animal clinic, in which stuffed animals could be cared for; a restaurant for making and serving delicious meals; a beach in a sand-table littered with "trash", an invitation into thinking about care as an environmental practice; a dishwashing station, as an example of care in a domestic, everyday space; a gardening area to dig around in, complete with toy bugs and seeds for planting; and a station where children could help marine life recover from pollution. The provocations ranged from inviting children to participating in individual care practices to environmental ones, supporting the development of an understanding that care can expand to make the world fit for humans and the more-than-human world as well.

Children from all three of ELM's playrooms joined the students in the classroom, and very quickly engaged with several of the provocations. For 45 minutes, children and students played, read, ran around, and deeply engaged in a variety of caring activities together. Afterwards, students were asked to reflect on their experiences. The following are excerpts from students' reflections.

As the children arrived we noticed that many gravitated toward the animal clinic provocation. Children selected a stuffy, and quickly set out to care for it. After some time this transformed into other experiences of care.

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Madison reflects:

"...then the children turned to care for the animals using the medical tools provided...then, they began to use the stethoscopes on themselves and the animals...the children then turned and started using them on the adults. One child I was interacting with said, "Okay, now your knee" and turned to check out my eyes, ears, mouth, and heart. Once the children were done checking out the educators, they returned to the animals and took care of their injuries."

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The children's enthusiasm for taking care of the stuffies transformed into caring for each other and the educators playing beside them, moving from pretend patients to real-world play partners. In this we are reminded of Paulo Freire and his ideas of reading the word and reading the world. "The act of reading cannot be explained as merely reading words since every act of reading words implies a previous reading of the world and a subsequent rereading of the world" (1985, p.18). Following this, we feel that the concept of 'reading' could be interchanged with the concept of 'playing', and that doing so offers a new perspective about how playing is a profound way to come to new understandings about the world. Playing in this way is also a collaborative and caring dynamic - making and remaking our understandings, and making and remaking the world. The students made note of this collaborative caring action, as can also be seen in the following passage:





Santana wrote:

"I asked if they thought the seeds had enough water, and one child proceeded to tell me "no, they are very thirsty." I was able to see the way children cared in many different ways. Since there was a high water demand, and each time a child wanted more water from me, they would say "thank you", help me pour the water, or offer to do it, etc. The children showed caring dispositions through their interaction and the garden provocation. It was great to see how universal and complex caring practices can be. Through this experience, I explored my caring techniques, and I think our group was able to embrace the messiness of mud and the unpredictability of being alongside children."

Santana highlights that by playing alongside the children, students were invited to think about the ways that they participate in caring practices themselves. By acknowledging each other in their play and collaborating together, students were able to watch how focusing on care with children also helps them attend to relationships in which children's rights become visible. In these caring provocations, children and students were able to practice a variety of ways to make the world a better place for children.

Reflecting on this event, Noah writes:

"As an instructor of emerging early childhood educators, seeing students' knowledge of the UNCRC and children's rights develop is an incredibly hopeful dynamic. The play possibilities lab allowed students to see care pedagogies and children's rights be enacted concretely - in ways that inform educators' practices and which suggest ideas that students can carry out with them into the field."

As Canada moves towards building a national early learning and child care system to support all children, it is so important that ELCC students and new educators moving out into the field carry with them the concepts of rights and care working together. Educators equipped with these perspectives have the potential to contribute to the shaping of this emergent system as a public good rather than a service or a commodity.

## Concluding Thoughts

As we continue our intergenerational collaborations in STM: Early Childhood at ELM, we are committed to keep experimenting with different approaches to enacting children's rights and cultivating our communities of care. We believe that by doing this we will nourish our growing understandings of how to live in the world in rights-based ways.

We also commit to pushing our experimenting and practice forward, by exploring the following ideas:

- Refining our approaches to involving even more members of our early childhood community in intergenerational collaboration, by working together with BECCS faculty, students, ELM children and families, and ELM educators, and at the same time opening to other members of our community.
- We look forward to collaborating with local Indigenous communities, including kihêw waciston, MacEwan University's Indigenous Centre, to explore the possibilities of bridging Indigenous ways of knowing and being with children's rights approaches;
- Continue to inspire and educate local and provincial stakeholders about the importance of centering children, childhood, and children's rights in the Albertan context;
- Amplify children's voices and engagement in our advocacy efforts and activities - developing future explorations of children's rights led by children

We are excited about the possibilities these goals offer to our early childhood community. By engaging whole-heartedly in them and as evident from the explorations that were a part of STM: Early Childhood - ELM 2022/2023, we continue to believe that a world rooted in rights-based ways and communities that care is a world fit for children.

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