

Shaking the Movers 2025-2026: Early Childhood



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Land acknowledgement

We want to acknowledge that what we call Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory of many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples who lived on and cared for these lands and the children of these lands since time immemorial. We honour and respect the history, languages, ceremonies, and culture of the First Peoples who call this territory home. The place ELM calls home - where we live, work, play, and rest - is in Treaty Six Territory.

The First People's connection to the land teaches us about our inherent responsibility to protect and respect Mother Earth and to one another. With this acknowledgment, we honour the history of all that has occurred here - the joys and the sorrows and suffering, and we recommit to the process of ongoing collective healing for all human beings.

We acknowledge the rich traditions of storytelling for the First Peoples, that stories are told to teach, inform, inspire and entertain. We listen with open hearts and minds to our own stories and the stories of others.

We are reminded that the honouring of children has taken place on this land for many, many generations and that this land has always been a place of learning and sharing, so we are honoured to learn and share with you.

Dedication

With admiration, we 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 dedication to children everywhere continues to be felt, not only in the lives of children and youth, but also in the lives of the countless educators and advocates who have been inspired by her life and work. We are committed to Landon's vision and continue our work to uphold and enact children's rights.



Matias' objects of identity

A large ball slips out of Matias' hands, rolling down his body and falls to the floor with a thump. He pauses, bends his knees and scoops the ball into his hands pulling it up his body and resting it in the middle with his arm reaching as far as they will go to secure it. Matias brought a basketball to ELM today.

Spring snow falls in large wet flakes this morning, Matias enters the room with his parent wearing pink rubber boots and ski goggles, seemingly ready to take on Alberta's most unpredictable weather.

Pink flashes down the hallway as Matias runs to the Partridge Room door. He joins the playroom with a beaming smile, wearing a pink baseball helmet, likely a borrowed item from his older sister.

A faint and muffled sound sings from the locker area, catching the ears of a few children. They approach Matias's locker with curiosity, underneath his backpack, surrounded by snowpants, jackets and extra clothes, lights flash and an engine sound purrs. Matias' school bus from home has captured the children's attention.

Two legs are stretched out long across the floor and end with slippered feet that are repeatedly clinking together. Matias is wearing his PawPatrol slippers today. With Marshal on one foot and Chase on the other, he looks down at his feet and makes an amused sound as the flapable ears of the characters move as he moves.

Matias



Ski Goggles



Baseball Helmet



Bus



Basketball

Pink Rubber Boots



PawPatrol Slippers



Portraits with Addie

With a pencil in hand, Addie draws a large circle on a piece of paper followed by two half circles above. Moving her pencil to inside the drawn circle she begins to move her pencil back and forth along the top middle of her drawing, looking to me she states “I have bangs so these are bangs” With a flourish that lets me know that Addie has drawn many self portraits she continues, drawing her eyes, eyelashes, eyebrows, ears and a smiling mouth. Signing the picture with heart and her name, Addie exclaims, “ Look, it’s me!”

Pulling another piece of paper from the pile, Addie promptly begins drawing two circles, one bigger than the other. She moves the pencil in a circular motion around the head making a squiggle of curly hair for her sister, Mabel. Adding the finish touches of facial features, Addie proudly shares that this drawing is her and her sister.

Selecting one last piece of paper, Addie declares she will draw her family next. She starts to place out heads with stickbodies on the paper, proportionately drawing her mom, dad, and sister in relation to her height. With the heads and bodies drawn, Addie begins to draw distinct facial features for her family members. She notes her dad’s shorter hair and scratchy beard, longish hair for her mom, curly short hair for her sister, and of course bangs for herself. With a proud smile, Addie looks at her drawing and declares, “This is my family... but I also have a dog and cat but don’t know how to draw them. Can you help?” After a dog and cat are added to the page, Addie looks at her family portrait and announces that it is “perfect” before moving about the rest of her day.

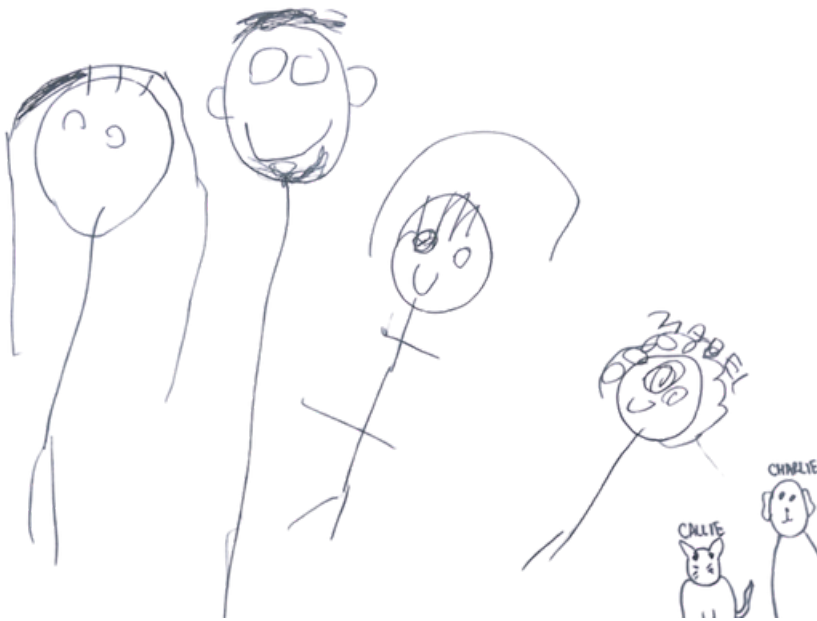
Addie



Self Portrait



Sibling Portrait



Family Portrait

ADDIE

Signature



Young children's expressions of identity

Young children are deeply involved in the work of shaping their identities. It is one of the biggest privileges of working in the early years to witness children as they explore how they want to express themselves, and how they come to know who they are. It is amazing that in 2026 we continue to need to push against outdated images of young children as blank slates. How could this be so, when in our experience children join our early childhood communities with a wealth of personality, ideas, and perspectives? Even our youngest children, coming to us as infants, have preferences and particularities that stem from their unique selves. *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) emphasizes this when it talks about "...nurturing each child's identity as a mighty learner and citizen..." (p. 10).

Children's rights frameworks provide us with ways to think about children as citizens. While children do not have what might be considered the civic rights of citizens, what we mean when we use this term is that children are members of and contributors to our communities. At their heart, children's rights are about acknowledging the personhood of each child, and striving alongside them to help them reach their fullest potential - both in the present as young children and as their future selves in adulthood (Alderson, 2008). When we see children as persons, we understand them as distinct beings made up of and having their own particular constellations of characteristics, histories, inheritances, surprises, and ways of being in and knowing the worlds around them. It is up to us - the caring adults in their lives and the movers and decision-makers in their societies - to make space for them to explore and express those constellations.

In early learning and child care, we see children express themselves in many different ways. One key way is through materials. Another key way is the play that they engage in. Finally, we see children express themselves in the relationships that they cultivate with others. All three of these ways are apparent in the moments we share of Matias and Addie.

Matias demonstrates his understanding of self through toys and materials, bringing objects from home that he feels connected with and that he wants to share with - or at least show to - the rest of the playroom. A practice that started as a young toddler when he began his time at ELM in November 2024, he enters with balls, toy vehicles, and clothing that reflect and refract his interests, things that are important to him - and these objects in turn reflect and refract who he is. These are not incidental, they are intentional expressions of what matters to Matias. The educators and other children at ELM celebrate Matias sharing these diverse facets of himself. Matias plays with the objects and materials that he's brought into the centre, and the other children show deep interest in what he shares with them. These moments of shared interest contribute to the connections and friendships Matias is cultivating with the other children. Children make connections with other materials in the room, noting a particular babydoll is preferred by one child or a favourite book of another child. Both children and adults actively construct identity, their own and others, through relationships and recognition of who we are and how we are together. Materials become a shared language, inviting children to connect sometimes before they have the physical words to do so. From our adult perspective, we hold an idea of who this child is, shaped by observations, documentation and our relationship with him and his family. At the same time, Matias holds his own understanding of himself, revealed in how he moves through the space, through the objects he carries and the items he wears. These two understandings of identity, ours and his, exist in relation to one another continually shifting and expanding as our days together unfold.

Similarly, Addie invokes stories of herself in her artistic expressions. She locates herself in a network of family in her illustrations, sharing the connections she has with important people in her life in her drawings. Addie has been at ELM since September 2024, and is familiar with the centre's rights-based approach to children's living, learning, and growing. Now in

the Chickadee Room, among the oldest children in our early childhood community, we can see her experimentation with drawing and other visual media as playing with materials. In her self-portraits and illustrations of her family members she is making her relationships with herself and with others visible. Materials, play, and relationships manifest again as tools for self expression and the exploration of identity. The inclusion of this moment with Addie was selected not because it is unusual, but because it is deeply familiar. For many children, drawing is a way to make sense of their world and share their understanding with those around them. Moments like this offer rich insight into how children understand themselves and express their identities when afforded time, space and materials.

We recognize that educators play a vital role in nurturing a community that values each member and honour each child's right to express who they are. By welcoming personal items, noticing patterns, naming connections and embracing curiosity, educators communicate you belong here as you are. We observe each child engaging in these types of expression of identity. Educators hold pockets of insight into who each child is, an understanding layered through observation, connection and relationship. These insights then guide educators in building spaces of belonging and communities that nurture children in being and becoming. Stories like Matias and Addie's, remind us that identity formation is an ongoing, everyday process for all children. When educators see, hear, and value these moments, they uphold children's rights to identity and expression while creating communities where children are mighty learners and citizens (Makovichuk et al., 2014).

Reflections on student practice

In the BECCS program, we work to foreground children's personhood, and celebrate their capacities for expression. Our first curriculum class in the program is called Languages of Expression, and in that course early childhood education students are introduced to the variety of materials that are often made available to children in early learning contexts (Fox and Schirmacher, 2015). Students are invited to explore the nature of materials, and in ways that follow concepts of relational materiality (Davies, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2010, 2011; Myers, 2019) and that echo Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and learning (Simon, 2021; Simon & Martin, 2024). From these explorations, students begin to devise play possibilities that invite children into relationships and interactions with a range of materials - paper, clay, paint, sand, movement, light & shadow & colour, music, natural materials, with body language or with silence - as means for self expression. Building from the work of Ann Pelo (2017) we encourage our students to help children become friends with these materials.

Additionally, an emergent approach is emphasized for curricular decision-making in the BECCS program. Students are encouraged to observe children carefully, and cultivate relationships with them. In these observations and relationships, they discover alongside children what they are interested in, and then tailor activities and the environment in order to support children's learning and growth while they engage in play and the daily routines of child care, deepening those interests and understandings. This approach has a celebration of identities built into it, and by engaging in this way students learn the skills required to balance individual and group needs and identities in the playroom.

BECCS students then have an opportunity to put their learning about children's rights and children's expressions of their identity into practice in their Field Placement experiences. When students are placed at ELM, they join in our ongoing explorations of enacting children's rights in collaboration with children, families and educators. We are fortunate to be able to learn together.

Reflections on educator practice

Our first Shaking the Mover's report from 2019 emphasized the significance of identity and self expression as foundational to children's well-being, belonging, and sense of security. That understanding continues to guide our practice today. We recognize that even young children hold multiple, layered, and evolving identities that are shaped through relationships, experiences, and the social and cultural context they move within. We understand that children actively construct and negotiate their identity in exchanges with others, be it among adults, with children, or among children (Edwards et al., 2011), and as they make sense of their place in the world.

Educators play an important role in making children's right to identity and expression visible and lived. Through intentional practice, educators create environments where children are seen, heard and valued in all their iterations. This includes noticing the ways children communicate who they are, through objects they bring from home, the marks they make on paper, the stories they tell through play, and the relationships they form. These expressions are recognized as meaningful contributions that inform how children are understood within the community.

Children's rights are enacted in everyday practice. While educators listen closely, respond with respect, and design environments that invite self expression, they uphold children's rights to identity, voice and participation. These practices support children in seeing themselves as individuals and also members of a collective. Educators affirm children's right to be themselves, to belong, and to be recognized within a community that intentionally sees and hears them.

Our commitments

We are committed to this work. Inspired by Landon's vision, and the powerful expressions of identity children make everyday in the playroom, we will continue to work together to enact children's rights in our practice at ELM.

We are not alone. Our commitments to children's identity, expression, and participation are reflected in the recent publication of a new set of Guiding Principles for Ethical Practice in Early Childhood Education, developed by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA). These principles were created in collaboration with educators, students, and community partners. This document strengthens the work educators are already doing alongside children by offering an ethical lens rooted within a children's rights framework.

While children's rights are woven throughout the Guiding Principles, Principle 5 - *We are committed to seeing every child as strong, capable, and full of potential* - calls on educators to honour children's autonomy, agency, and rights in ways that nurture belonging and meaningful participation (Kleinfeld, 2026). This principle recognizes that children have the right to participate in ways that reflect their diverse identities and lived experiences, and it invites educators to co-construct environments where children can express themselves - through culture, play, movement, and choice.

Working in community, with partners like AECEA - and the countless other early childhood educators and children's rights advocates across Alberta - provides us with fuel to continue this work. Thank you for also being members of that community.

Thank you

Thank you 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 to our centre 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. The ideas brought forward in *Flight* serve to underpin our work, express our pedagogical commitments, and inspire renewal, growth, and transformation.

We would like to acknowledge the ongoing collaboration and funding from The Muttart Foundation and The Landon Pearson Resource Centre. They encourage us to deeply consider what it means to uphold a rights-based childcare program.

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