



CREATING A
**Culture of
Reflective
Practice**

The Role of
Pedagogical Leadership
in Early Childhood
Programs

**Anne Marie Coughlin
Lorrie McGee Baird**

Foreword by Deb Curtis

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IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Anne Marie Coughlin and Lorrie McGee Baird

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Dedication

To our fathers who have left us in body but not in spirit.
Thank you for giving us the gift of stories. We love you.

To our mothers, Catherine Darling and Brenda McGee,
who remain our biggest admirers and think we are smarter than we are.



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Foreword

“Time has a wonderful way of showing us what really matters.”

∞ often attributed to Margaret Peters

*I*t’s lunchtime for my group of toddlers, and there is much to do before we can sit down to eat. As we come in from the yard, we need to support the children to take off shoes and put them in the shoe basket, hang coats, change diapers, fill out diaper charts, sit on the potty, and wash hands.

We are encouraging a small group in the entry hall with their shoes, and as usually happens, several children are attracted to climbing the stairway next to us. Finally, my coteacher and I convince everyone to come down from the stairs and get their shoes off and into the basket. She leaves for the classroom with a small group of children while I assure her we will follow right behind.

Then, of course, Malcom decides to dump all the shoes out, and with a big grin, puts the basket over his head. If you have ever spent any time with a group of toddlers, I’m sure you can picture this joyful mayhem.

All the children stop what they are doing and look at Malcom with keen interest. I decide to go with this moment. We all peek at Malcom through the holes in the basket and giggle together. We can see him in there! Then, of course, everyone wants to try so we take a little more time as each child puts the basket on their head. After we’ve all had a turn to peek through the basket—including me!—everyone happily helps put the shoes back in the basket and we head into the room.

My title in this program is mentor teacher, so my job is to work side by side with my coteachers, offering support for our daily life together as well as for reflective practice and curriculum development. Because of my role as one of the classroom educators, I feel the pressure of how much time this first step in our transition has taken, knowing there is so much left to follow. I know my coworker is expecting me to hurry along so we can get to lunch



in a timely manner. And yes, I think she would be worried, along with me, about all the shoe germs that might be lingering in that basket.

But after many, many years of working with children and adults in early childhood programs, I am committed to taking time to pause and marvel with the children about what really matters, including this moment of children's delightful connection with each other around Malcom's lively investigation, even if this takes more time than the schedule suggests. Yes, it matters that we embrace the important caregiving tasks, and it matters that we follow a routine to organize our ways to be together, and it's also important to take time for health and safety measures. Making sure I live up to my responsibility with my coworkers really matters to me too.

I can respond to the pressure and rush through this time, focused on looking at the clock and getting the tasks done. But I have come to see that these unfolding moments are what create the quality of our programs, as they nourish both the children and ourselves. It is in these moments where children learn about themselves, grow relationships, help each other, and bring their curious minds to wonder and learn about the world around us. If I help my coteachers take time to pause and appreciate these moments, it brings more joy to our work and gives us opportunities to see the powerful roles we can play together in children's lives. Experiencing the value of studying these delightful encounters encourages our willingness to give the children a little extra time for the moments. Ensuring that we take time to pause, to observe, to study and appreciate the many moments throughout our days with children is the most powerful and effective professional development we can offer.

I have advocated in all of my professional development work and writing for educators that slowing down to notice and take up these moments is vital to the work. The response usually is "We have so much to do that we don't have time." I personally understand this response, as I have spent many years doing this daily work in a busy classroom. Just getting through a day with a group of young children requires so many different tasks: planning, meeting and talking with families, setup, cleanup, nose wiping, conflict resolution, and so much more. The nature of the work leaves us breathless as we hurry to get it all done. We have to make an intentional commitment to take the time for engaging with these moments.

Policy makers, regulators, and administrators develop standards, assessment tools, rating scales, and checklists that they expect us to spend our time doing. We often are required to attend conferences and workshops, usually getting information from "experts" about techniques and curriculum models that specifically tell us how to use our time, often without reflections

on ourselves or what is unfolding with our children. And commercial early childhood companies suggest that we can save time by buying their products, rather than observing our children and taking the time to plan, collect, and invent our own creative invitations for their play and learning.

The reality is that it is impossible to magically create additional time in our workday, but as leaders, mentors, and directors we can think more about how educators spend the time we have. We have the power to decide how we use time in staff meetings, planning curriculum, and completing documentation. We can carve out more time in our organizations and model approaches that support educators to use the time they have to pause and study, to nourish themselves and deepen their relationships with each other and their practices with children. Reimagining the use of time is the key to quality programs for children and adults. How we use our time defines who we are as educators, as a program, as a profession, as a community, and as a world.

The most fruitful way to help educators slow down to take time to see what really matters is having someone to work side by side with us. Someone who encourages us to notice and study children's competencies, to name what we see and value during our daily lives. Someone to offer us different points of view, counter inequity, and challenge us to examine our own bias. Someone who shares professional information, current research, required assessments, and checklists and who supports us to reflect on how we can make these meaningful for our daily work. Someone to help us to think of all the possible ways we can make meaning of what is unfolding, rather than look for a "right" way. Someone who helps us identify the roles we might play in children's lives based on our values and what matters to us, the children, and their families. Someone who respects us and knows that we are reflective thinkers who can research answers to our own questions and make meaningful decisions for our work. Someone who helps us live into our best selves as educators. Someone who helps us see the benefit of taking time to do this work for our own lives as humans. And most important, someone who can help carve out and advocate for the time and how to use it to support us to do this crucial reflective work.

The great news is my brilliant friends and colleagues Lorrie McGee Baird and Anne Marie Coughlin have written this book about being one of these supportive people in an educator's life. It is a complex book, with big ideas for working with educators, inviting us to think through our values, define them for ourselves, and support educators to do the same. The concrete way they have organized the book, using many visionary ideas and practical approaches, helps the book be relatable, manageable, and doable. They offer

relevant stories to study, reflecting real children, educators, and pedagogical leaders working together in early childhood programs. They specifically outline worthwhile learning experiences to use with children, educators, mentors, and pedagogical leaders. I haven't counted, but I think there may be more than a hundred provocative questions to take up in various aspects of our work with children, families, and each other.

Lorrie and Anne Marie know that what they suggest in this book are not easy, quick fixes. They tell stories of their own learning journey; from teachers who once followed themes and scripts and rigidly defined strategies to reflective educators who invented ways to question their own practices, leading their organizations with a vision for building structures that create a culture of reflective practice. They report on their willingness to take up difficult, complex issues and tease them apart to find meaningful ways to engage and address them.

They discuss one of the current critical issues white women leaders like myself face—moving away from the white supremacist, European-centered foundation of early education to one that strives to center other cultures and ways of being. This is particularly pertinent for the authors' Canadian context when it comes to Indigenous, First Nations people whose land they acknowledge they occupy. You will hear the ways they approach antibias education, social justice, and equity, admitting that this is what they know now while always asserting they have so much to learn and harm to undo.

Lorrie and Anne Marie have created structures for openness throughout this book. It is a term I learned from my long-ago visionary mentors and professors at Pacific Oaks College, Elizabeth Jones and Elizabeth Prescott. The idea behind this term has resonated with me in all my work with children and adults. It suggests that we need a structure or a shared, defined process that helps us focus together on an idea or a task, an open structure designed to invite many possible ideas and ways of learning and being.

I think of organizing my classroom for children with this idea in mind. There is a structure in how we design and arrange the space to make visible the shared approaches for being together. Yet within this structure, children are invited to bring themselves and their own ideas to explore, invent, and work together in many different ways. This same concept can be applied for the structures we plan for our adult learners. Rather than a checklist, assessment, or model that has specific tasks to complete, a structure for openness might include a protocol with a set of questions or an experience that defines a shared understanding of how we will work together to learn. The intention of the structure is to invite many perspectives with different ways of thinking about and accomplishing the work. These structures can contribute

to inclusive, equitable approaches to teacher education, as they invite collaboration with attention and respect for diverse perspectives as central to the work.

The authors share many structures for openness and experiences they have successfully used in their work as pedagogical leaders in two large, multisite programs where they have taken the time to slowly and deliberately build structures that support and sustain cultures of reflective practice. I have visited both programs many times and have been in awe with how their work truly reflects the values, practices, and approaches they offer here.

This book is about using time for what matters. And it will take time to study the ideas in the book, try out some of the structures, and ponder the questions. The book will be useful for educators' daily work with children, as you will be inspired to take up the many provocative questions and want to invite others to study your work with you. It will be inspiring for people working as mentors, coaches, and pedagogical leaders, as there are a multitude of innovative practices for engaging adults in studying their work with children. If you are a director, this book will kindle a desire in you to design budgets, staffing, and administrative supports for the time it requires to do work that truly enhances quality. And if you are an administrator, licenser, curriculum developer, or policy maker, perhaps this book will help you see how impactful it could be to develop accountability systems that have reflective practices as their foundation.

If you find yourself thinking "I can't imagine having time for all of this," I would suggest that you use Anne Marie and Lorrie's book as inspiration. Although they give some examples of their own organizational structures for making time, they don't try to answer the logistical or organizational questions for making more time. Only you can reimagine the use of time in your organization and determine how you will carve out more time for creating a culture of reflective practice. This book will show you concrete and inspirational ways to use your time, and, even more important, illustrate why taking this time for reflection is essential for the vibrancy of our programs, the nourishment of our educators, and the quality of experiences for our children and families. This book can help you answer the question: How will we use the time we have for what really matters?

—*Deb Curtis*





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Welcoming Complexity into Our Work

“The path isn’t a straight line—it is a spiral. You continually come back to things you thought you understood and see deeper truths.”

∞ *Barry H. Gillespie*

Take a moment to consider . . .

What has been your journey in early learning?

What do you think it means to be a pedagogical leader?

What are you hoping for as you begin this book?

We are story sharers, which is slightly different than storytellers.

For years we have been gathering and sharing stories from the early learning classrooms we have had the good fortune to work in and visit. As pedagogical leaders, classroom stories have been one of the most powerful tools we have encountered to help us learn about ourselves, connect with other people, and reflect on practice. So for us it makes sense that we construct our book about pedagogical leadership around stories.

We are also drawn to thinking with structures. Not the kind of rigid structures that do the thinking for you but a variety of open structures that invite questions to help guide, challenge, and expand our thinking.

The stories and structures that we offer in this book are some of the ones we use in our work with the pedagogical leaders and educators in our own organizations and in our consulting work. We offer them to you as an invitation to explore, share, and learn from your own stories of practice.

While we had been toying around with writing together for years, it wasn’t until spring 2019 that the ideas for this particular book began to take root. With the encouragement and nudging of our good friend and mentor Deb Curtis, we felt it was time to share some of the thinking and practices that we have found to be so useful over the years. Little could we have known just how much the world was about to change.

Of all the challenges we could have imagined in writing a book, doing it in the middle of a global pandemic wasn't one of them. Like so many others, we have had to learn to move and work differently. It has been a tremendously emotional time during which we have needed to develop new approaches, learn new terminology, rethink budgets, and find creative ways to connect with each other. Yet with all of the loss and challenge that COVID-19 has unleashed on the world, the virus has also offered an opportunity for us to slow down, deeply consider the purpose of our work, and strengthen our resolve to build the kind of world we want to live in. The pandemic has reminded us that we are all global citizens, and our actions have a profound impact on each other and the planet we live on. If there was ever a time for stories of hope and healing in the world, it is now.

In early childhood education, hopefulness has always been our call to action. We have an ethical responsibility to enter our work wearing an armor of optimism. We owe it to children to focus on a future that is worthy of them. To see our challenges as opportunities and leave the world in a better place than we found it. This is our work, and it's why we have written this book.

PEDAGOGY AND PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP

We are living in a rapidly changing world, and as people who live and work with the earth's youngest humans, what we do matters greatly. How might we meet the challenge of our times and work in ways that can help heal the world? How might we reexamine the purpose of education and think more deeply about the kind of educators we want to be? How can we focus our teaching practices around compassion, curiosity, imagination, experimentation, collaboration, innovation, and kindness? We believe the pathway to a new kind of thinking in early childhood is to take a new approach to leadership, one that moves us beyond the administration of rules and regulations and takes a pedagogical approach.

The words *pedagogy* and *pedagogical leader* are relatively new terms for many early childhood educators. Depending on whom you talk to, you will find many different interpretations for each. In education, we think of pedagogy as the study of the teaching and learning processes and the pedagogical leader as someone who supports that study. When we reflect back on our careers, we can see that we were pedagogical leaders long before we knew what the word *pedagogy* meant. As educators in the classroom, we were always curious and eager to understand more about children's learning and thinking.



We intuitively understood that it was our responsibility to create conditions for relationships to unfold. When we moved out of the classroom and into formal leadership roles, we brought that same curiosity and understanding to our work with adults. Over time, we have come to see the role of a pedagogical leader as someone who is curious about thinking and learning, sees the competencies of others, understands the importance of relationships, and develops structures to grow a culture of reflective practice and critical thinking. A pedagogical leader is someone who nurtures learning dispositions and is guided by strong values and a vision for themselves and others.



“If I compare a pedagogical leader with a manager, the latter is someone who hovers around and micro-manages to check off a to-do list while the former is a person who shows the direction and vision to follow and also inspires others to research and learn for the sake of personal and professional growth.”

☞ *Sonya, educator*

We know that for many people, the idea of being a pedagogical leader themselves might be new. Historically, leadership in early childhood has leaned more toward the administrative side. Let’s face it, for some folks even pronouncing the word *pedagogy* is a difficult task. Whether your tongue trips over the word or not, if you are interested in growing a culture of reflective thinking in yourself and others, this book is for you. This book is for educators and leaders who are interested in the relationships that unfold through the teaching and learning opportunities that take place every day and how they can become more intentional in their practice. It is for those who want to explore principles that can act as a foundation for their work and who are eager to collaborate and think with others. If this is you, then perhaps you will begin to see yourself as a pedagogical leader as well. While we see that educators in the classroom can take up the role of pedagogical leader alongside children, we have written this book for those leaders who support the work of adults on behalf of their work with young children. We believe all pedagogical leaders deserve a pedagogical leader and an organization that systemically supports this approach.

“My pedagogical leader has definitely shifted my practices as an educator and person. She has helped me build and grow frameworks that challenge my thinking and perspectives.”

☞ *Carrie, educator*

We have experienced firsthand the transformation that takes place when early learning professionals are supported by organizations and leaders who take up a pedagogical approach to their work together. When guided by clear pedagogical principles and intentional practices, educators and pedagogical leaders begin to learn more about themselves and the impact of their work.

THINKING ABOUT QUALITY IN EARLY EDUCATION

It is without question that ensuring quality is one of the greatest responsibilities pedagogical leaders take on. The word *quality* has been part of early childhood rhetoric for as long as we can remember, and for many the pressure to achieve this thing called *quality* is enormous. For years we have been involved in discussions at various tables where dedicated people have searched for the best way to create quality environments. We have been witness to (and, yes, even tried using) a wide variety of checklists, standards, and programs that have been imposed on the early childhood community with the promise of obtaining some kind of “high-quality” experience for children. It seems that every year we are bombarded with some new approach designed to offer a foolproof path to quality. Out of a deep desire to be perceived as a strong and competent educator or leader, we can end up imposing ideas on ourselves and others that have been curated around someone else’s perception of quality. All too often these ideas have been narrowly focused around one particular worldview and leave little room for thinking about the role of education and teaching in today’s changing world.

With everything leaders are responsible for, it is easy to see how these predesigned approaches can be alluring. And yet, in our combined seventy years of working in this field, we have yet to stumble on any one foolproof standard, checklist, or program that can ensure quality. In fact, we question whether ensuring quality is even possible or ethical. Perhaps it is because there is no one way to think about quality. Quality is complex and personal. It seems to us that asking, “How do we ensure quality?” is not nearly as useful as asking other questions, like “What does quality mean? Who gets



to decide? What does quality look, feel, smell, or taste like? Who benefits and who is excluded?” What systems can we design to make sure we include these kinds of questions about quality in all aspects of our organization? Digging into these kinds of questions can help us to see that there are many ideas, many paths, and many stories about quality. The process invites complex thinking and helps us resist the temptation of defining it from a single narrative—one that may benefit only a small portion of the population.

The more we listen to each other, question our certainties, and consider multiple perspectives, the more we come to realize that there is far more about our work (and this world) that we don’t know than we do. Being open to each other and different ideas can help us resist leaning toward one universal truth and aid us in realizing that we are continuously learning as we shift and expand our understanding. It can liberate us from thinking that we need to have the one right answer and inspire us to consider other stories. It can shift us from saying “Now we know this” (a declaration of certainty) to “This is what we know now” (an admission that we are continuously shifting and growing and there is no end to our knowing).

When we are willing to embrace the complexity of our work, we become open to many ways of being and we begin to understand that there are many stories and many truths. By suggesting this, we are not implying that anything goes. Instead, we are interested in considering *how* we work together, not simply *what* we produce in our work. We understand that to take up this complex work, we need to develop intentional structures and approaches that invite attention and the time for it.

Over the years, we have come to think more in principles than rules or standards. We believe that principles offer guidance and invite the complexity we need to think about and construct our work. We are interested in contributing to an early learning system that considers more than what is laid out on a developmental checklist or a rating scale. We are interested in a system that considers the kind of classrooms we want to create and the kind of educators and leaders we want to be. We are interested in working toward creating an early learning system where children and adults are seen through a lens of strength. Where we listen to each other and share deep respect for the different ways we can all live in the world. Where issues of equity and social justice are a driving force in our work. We are interested in being a part of an early learning system that considers the impact of its decisions on the land and supports children’s inborn connection to the earth. We support a system where educators are intellectually and emotionally engaged alongside children and families. A system of early learning that is eager to grow and learn together, where professional learning is less about training





individuals to conform to a prescribed standard of practice and more about growing a profession and programs that are built on becoming better humans. We know that the kind of system we are talking about is grounded in strong values and understands the power of relationships. It is from these beliefs that we identified the four overarching principles that frame the chapters of this book. They act as a guide to help us to consider how we think and learn alongside one another.

- Pedagogical Leaders Work from a Place of Values and Vision
- Pedagogical Leaders Focus on Building Meaningful Relationships
- Pedagogical Leaders See and Support Competence in Children and Adults
- Pedagogical Leaders Support Learning in Multiple Ways by Design

These internalized ideas shape the way we want to make meaning of our work and live our lives. This is not a definitive list of principles. You may well have others. But for us, they encompass the ideas that have emerged from our work. They hold us accountable. They are the touchstones, the foundations that we have come to build our organizational systems and pedagogical practice on. We hope they will do the same for you. While they may seem simple, they are profoundly complex. We like that. These are conceptual ideas that can be pulled apart in many different ways and considered through many perspectives. We don't pretend to be experts on them. We turn to our colleagues to help us. We look to scholars, seek the wisdom of elders, pay attention to artists and philosophers, and most important, learn from the many dedicated educators and pedagogical leaders who have graciously allowed us into their practice. This book is an invitation to join the conversation and explore these ideas with us.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

As pedagogical leaders we are researchers, searching to uncover the practices and approaches that have the greatest positive impact on early childhood practice. We are story sharers, understanding that it is stories that emotionalize our work and engage both our heart and mind. We are system thinkers and inventors, eager to create processes for thinking together. This book reflects each of these parts of us and is constructed around our own research and learning over the past thirty-five years.

We have designed this book so that you can dip into ideas under each principle. There is no need to work through it in a linear way. The principles live within each other and work together. What we have tried to offer is a glimpse into each of them with the hope that you will be inspired to take them up and build on them in a way that makes the most sense to you. Under each of the four principles we have offered some specific ways that pedagogical leaders and educators can bring that principle out in their work. Each section is layered with stories and experiences from our work and highlights many of the practical structures that we have found useful in supporting others. While we have not always used the actual names of programs, educators, and pedagogical leaders we have worked alongside, these stories are a compilation of our collective work together. We hope you see yourself in these stories, and we hope they will inspire each of you, just as they have inspired us.

We offer here some of the many questions and approaches that we have found to be useful for ourselves and for many of the people we work with, but we recognize that everyone's brain understands things a little differently and not everything will work the same for everyone. We encourage you to play around with them and adapt them to your needs. Try them out. Build on them and let them be the catalyst for new questions and structures that can support your own creative and critical thinking. As you come to understand the profound impact of this approach, you will take on the larger and necessary work of advocating for transforming the systems, use of time, budgets, staffing, and professional development to ensure these practices can grow and be sustained.



“As a pedagogical leader, the use of structures has supported my work by providing a way to orient how I move through certain processes. They serve as a compass and bring intention to what I am doing and why. Bringing these structures into my work with others provides clarity and a shared understanding around the work that we are growing together.”

☞ Lindsay, pedagogical leader



A LITTLE ABOUT ANNE MARIE

In 1985 I opened the phone book (yes, we used books back then) and called the first child care listed to inquire about a job. When the person on the other end of the phone learned that I was a trained early childhood educator, I was hired sight unseen. No formal interview, no résumé, no onboarding, just a quick tour on my first day to learn where the craft supplies and bathroom were and, *voilà*, I was a preschool teacher. Thirty-five years later, I have dabbled in a few other things. I got married to my life partner, raised three kind, talented children, taught for a while at our local community college, sat on many different boards of directors, and even trained as an herbalist, but I never left that organization.

Thankfully much has evolved over the years, and we don't hire people over the phone anymore. Today London Bridge Child Care Services Inc. is a large multisite nonprofit child care organization located across three counties in southwestern Ontario, Canada. In a way, London Bridge has been a home for me. I feel as though I have grown up there. Over the years I have had the opportunity to work as a center director, professional development coordinator, and director of pedagogy, and today I act as the organization's educational director. One of the reasons I have stayed so long in one place is because that place both has allowed me to grow and has grown along with me.

Of all the possible child care centers I could have called that day, I found the one that would ultimately embrace my consistent need to challenge the status quo. I have a powerful imagination and creative spirit and am constantly conjuring up new projects, alternative approaches, and inventive ways to think about my work. I can imagine how difficult it must have been to work with me when I was younger. I was impatient, and my obsession with finding better ways to do things often stopped me from valuing the hard work and wisdom of the people I spent my days with. Thankfully, through the years I have been blessed with many mentors who have helped me learn to manage my creative unruliness without diminishing my creative spirit. No small task to be sure but one for which I will be forever grateful. My mentors have helped me experience the joy and benefit that comes from collaborating with others and have lovingly nurtured me to discover the values that guide my life. These are the people who have cared enough about me to help me be better. They are the ones who continue to help me learn what it means to be a pedagogical leader. Lorrie McGee Baird is one of those people. Lorrie will have her own story about it, but for me it has been her unwavering persistence that has been the impetus for us to become collaborative partners and cherished friends.

A LITTLE ABOUT LORRIE

I have known since my very early teen years that I wanted to work in early childhood education. After a high school co-op program, I was hooked. I graduated with my ECE diploma in 1985, a time in Ontario when jobs were abundant and in many ways you had a choice of where you wanted to work. I started out at a very small cooperative nursery school, known for its care and innovative practices. The director was Sheila Olan-MacLean, and though I did not know it at that time, she would become an integral part of my career for years to come. Over the next decade I worked in the classroom with various age groups and within different programs, learning from the children, families, and my colleagues along the way. My work at Fleming College lab school launched my work with adults. I was asked to teach a night school class, Early Childhood Methods, to a group of part-time ECE students. I knew then that I wanted to continue to find ways to learn alongside big people on behalf of little people. For the next ten years I continued to grow my career at our local community college and reach out to other communities to provide professional learning opportunities. In 1995, just a few months after the birth of my beautiful baby girl, Kennedy, I received a call from Sheila, who was now working as executive director of a small multisite organization. She was hosting a small conference for her team and invited me to join. She said it was about a new idea she was exploring and thought it was something I would love; the focus was emergent curriculum, and it was being held at a small spa and conference center close by. I must admit, having a new baby at home, the only word I really heard was “spa”! One of the presenters’ first slides said, “Teachers should all question their certainties.” The conference changed the trajectory of my career, and I never turned back. Fast-forward several years, and Sheila had become the executive director of a larger multisite child care organization, Kawartha Child Care Services, now known as Compass Early Learning and Care. In 2005, I joined the team as a curriculum consultant to support the journey from a theme-based program to a child-centered emergent curriculum. This is where my story with Anne Marie begins.

In the fall of 2005, the Ontario Association for Early Childhood Education held its annual conference in London, Ontario. As part of the conference, participants took tours of a variety of early learning programs. The Stoneybrook site at London Bridge was one of the programs on that tour, and I quickly realized I wanted to learn more about this organization and the person who was leading this work. London Bridge Child Care Services had been exploring practices of emergent curriculum for several years, while our organization was just beginning the journey. It seemed clear from the tour that the two



organizations shared a vision and values, both striving to learn more about the conditions and structure that could support an emergent curriculum inspired by the educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia, Italy. After multiple calls and a little persistence on my part, we finally connected. We became fast friends and colleagues in exploring ways to think and learn together. Our relationship continues to grow, and over the years we have become pedagogical leaders for each other, building a network of relationships between our two organizations and inspiring innovative practices that have influenced child care programs across Canada and the United States. Anne Marie is still one of the greatest gifts in both my personal and professional life.

While there are many parts of our lives where we are as different as night and day, when it comes to the values that drive our work, we are steadfastly united. Our experiences as pedagogical leaders of large multisite child care organizations have been remarkably similar, and through our work together over many years we have become valued thinking partners and critical friends. It is for these reasons that this book is written in our shared voice.

OUR OWN LEARNING JOURNEY

Over the years we have been blessed to work alongside and learn from many brilliant and compassionate people who have dedicated their lives to this work. We are grateful for the many opportunities we have been given to experiment with ideas and learn through our own mistakes.

We are humbled by the gifts of patience and understanding we have received from our colleagues as we have stumbled along in our own learning. In particular we are grateful to our own pedagogical leaders who have unwaveringly supported us in our work. While we have had the good fortune to be mentored by many brilliant women, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the influence that Margie Carter and Deb Curtis have had on our work and in our lives.

Many years ago, we were invited to participate as facilitators at an institute that Margie and Deb were doing in Ontario. We had been avid readers of their work and often followed them when they presented at conferences. We were drawn to them because they were some of the first people we had heard who openly spoke about the values that guided their practice. We were inspired by their deep desire to create spaces where educators and children could together be emotionally and intellectually engaged in learning, and we were encouraged by their commitment to reflective practice, collaboration, and perspective sharing. Over time, they also got to know us and invited us



to be a part of a network of people they had assembled who held these same values and were committed to the same work. Being a part of this network gave us opportunities to build lasting friendships and collaborate with pedagogical leaders across the United States, becoming fondly known as “the Canadians.”

In one of our many retreats together, Margie and Deb invited us to form a line based on when we had become part of this learning community. Each of us one by one formed a line connecting our hands and hearts in this moment of remembering all the experiences we had shared and all that we had learned together. “Look in front of you,” they said, “look to those who have offered you mentorship, and look behind you, as these are the people who will look to you.” It was a powerful moment. The room stood quiet, with many tears of joy and gratitude shed. We will always remember this moment as a call to action of sorts, a responsibility that every pedagogical leader has for those they mentor. The gifts, the lessons, and the journey each of us takes is to be shared with others so that they too can share with those who follow them. What we know is that every pedagogical leader deserves a pedagogical leader to follow. We will be forever grateful for the mentorship of our dear friends and colleagues Margie Carter and Deb Curtis. We hope you hear their voices in this book, as they have inspired so many of our values and practices.



HOW DO YOU MOVE AN ELEPHANT?

Our work has taken us to many cities, provinces, states, countries, and continents, and we often joke that we have spent more time in planes and hotel rooms together than we have with our own families. We have been graciously invited into schools and child care centers, working alongside educators and emerging pedagogical leaders to bring visibility to the important work that is happening in classrooms around the country.

In our province of Ontario, our organizations have become known for our innovative practices and deep commitment to our pedagogy. In 2012, the Ministry of Education in Ontario had been working toward transforming and modernizing the early learning sector and was beginning to explore a provincial pedagogy to support this work. The ministry had begun a consultation process across the province and invited people to share perspectives on the kinds of things they should be considering. Knowing that we had successfully transformed pedagogical practices across large multisite organizations, they invited us in as part of the consultation process. We were both



humbled and honored at the invitation. Rather than explaining any specific thing that we did, we wanted to offer the kinds of questions that we find most helpful in moving thinking and practice.

What is the nature of the organization and the community we hope to be?

What is the purpose of education?

What is the role of the early childhood educator?

What are our dreams for our classrooms?

How might children contribute to their own learning environments?

How are children portrayed in the environment? What are the stories we tell about them? How are their voices present?

How do children see themselves as part of a community?

How might we think about the role of the organization in professional development as something more than a means to disseminate a prescribed list of strategies and new ideas?

How might we design our organizations to nourish ourselves alongside children and families rather than simply striving to meet requirements?

The most profound thinking in our presentation came from some of the wisest folks we know: children. When we are faced with any momentous task, it can feel like we are trying to move an elephant. Transforming pedagogical practice across a province the size of Ontario is as monumental as you can get, so we asked a group of preschool children for their advice. We asked them, “How do you move an elephant?” Their answers became metaphors for pedagogical leadership.



LILLY SUGGESTED, “You get lots of people to help you pull it.”

METAPHOR: You need lots of people with a shared vision in an organization to pull together.

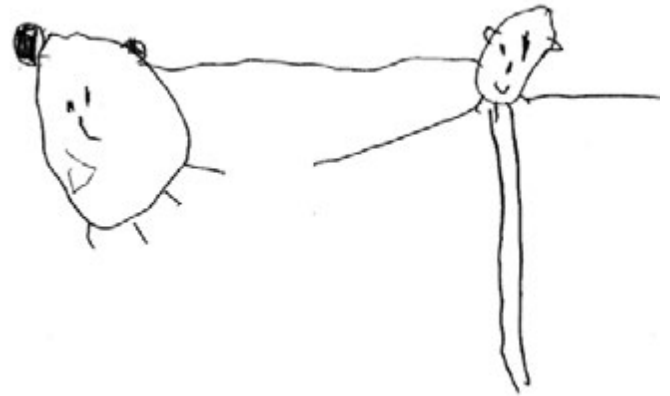
ABDULA SUGGESTED, “You can push his legs.”

METAPHOR: To move forward, you need to focus on taking one step at a time.



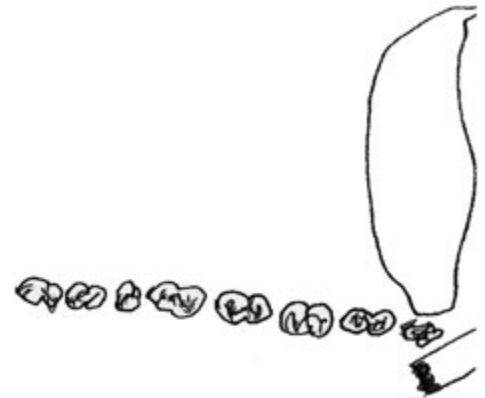
EVAN SUGGESTED, “Find a giant to push the elephant.”

METAPHOR: Giants are big and strong, and this is a big job. We need strong people in the lead to help move us along.



SARAH SUGGESTED, “Elephants like peanuts, so we could leave a trail of peanuts and he might like to follow the way we want him to go.”

METAPHOR: Offer incentives built into the organizational systems that people will enjoy along the way.



BEN SUGGESTED, “Scare him.”

METAPHOR: Sometimes moving can feel scary.



-BEN

ASK Him Nicely



CHARLIE SUGGESTED, "Ask him nicely."

METAPHOR: Often people just need to be invited to be a part of a change.



HAYDEN SUGGESTED, "He'll move if he wants to. I'll give him toys."

METAPHOR: Ultimately people take action when they see some value in what they are moving to and when they are given the time and resources to move.

Being a pedagogical leader calls us to walk steadfastly toward a future that is brighter for everyone. It asks us to step into something bigger than ourselves. It asks us to resist the ideas that an organization exists to get people to meet the rules and that the leader is the sole knowledge keeper. Instead we are called on to be compassionate listeners, eager learners, innovative inventors, and relentless pursuers of social justice. We hope you will walk alongside us on our journey. Together we can do so much.



Inspire change and support learning through pedagogical leadership!

As the field of early learning continues to grow and evolve, early childhood professionals and leaders need to reconcile the responsibility between completing never-ending administrative tasks, ensuring program quality, and supporting the growth of others. *Creating a Culture of Reflective Practice* is a comprehensive practical look at creating systems, structures, and protocols for supporting people and focusing teaching practices around compassion, curiosity, innovation, and a new approach to leadership.

Readers will develop the skills and mindsets that can enhance their performance and effect organizational change. Sharing stories of pedagogical leadership in practice, Anne Marie Coughlin and Lorrie McGee Baird identify four overarching principles that frame each chapter with ideas to enhance the work of educational leaders, coaches, and mentors.



Anne Marie Coughlin is educational director at London Bridge Child Care Services (Ontario, Canada). Over the past 35 years, she has held a variety of roles in the early learning sector and served as a provincial director with the Canadian Association for Young Children and as director at large for the Ontario Reggio Association.



Lorrie McGee Baird has been actively working in the early learning field for 30 years. Her experience ranges from classroom educator, director, college faculty, curriculum consultant, and now as the Executive Director of Pedagogy with Compass Early Learning and Care in Peterborough, Ontario.

“McGee Baird and Coughlin disrupt coaching and supervising approaches that disempower educators and invite us to consider pedagogical leadership that creates the conditions for relationships and learning to flourish. They share stories drawing on decades of experience transforming their own work, offer pages for reflection, and challenge us deeply.”

— Margie Carter, early childhood consultant and co-author of *The Visionary Director*

“Wow! I loved every minute of this book. If you only pick one book for your professional unfolding this year, make it this one. The depth of thinking, reflection and real-life stories set you on a path of deep learning and growth. This should be required reading in all ECE programs.”

— Dr. Jean Clinton, MD, FRCP (C), Clinical Professor Child Psychiatry McMaster University

