

# Are We in This Together? Why Embracing Aspects of Child Care in School Is Vital to Reimagining Education

Andrea Van Vliet

## Abstract

Child care and school are similar and interrelated, yet the comparison of school to child care seems contentious. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed pressure points in labeling these educational and care institutions essential—or not. This paper encourages collaboration between schools and child care as a vital component to reimagining education.

## Background

In 2006, I moved to the interior of British Columbia and, though armed with my freshly minted teaching license and boundless enthusiasm, I was unsuccessful in securing a teaching position. In what I felt was a consolation, I applied to a child care center and was hired to work in the toddler room. I soon learned my degree in elementary education meant very little as I was woefully underqualified to work with those toddlers. The Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) at the center graciously educated me to observe the children, document my observations, and use that input to create engaging provocations for the children. I became fascinated by the field of early learning, which focuses on birth to age six, and by the applied research on brain development, on how to see children's behavior as communication, and on supporting parents by caring for their children. I was enthralled by how deeply embedded care is in early education. When the opportunity to become a teacher arrived, I declined, choosing to spend my years immersed in supporting ECEs as a centre director, then joining the public service as an early learning and child care consultant and, most recently, as a manager of child care operations. Though initially perceived as a step beneath school, I am grateful I was granted the opportunity to join that toddler room, as it altered the course of my career. I have been humbled multiple times over the intervening years as the same dismissiveness I had initially felt toward child care has been echoed by teachers around me. While correcting misconceptions to elevate child care as education was already a well-established habit, the Covid-19 pandemic provided a shift in perspective where I now see how this dismissiveness not only serves to suppress child care, but also pedagogically limits teachers and their students.

I understand the comparison of school to child care to be contentious. I ground my work in a decolonizing pedagogy of solidarity as posited by Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez (2012), "...imagining human relations that are premised on the relationship between difference and interdependency, rather than similarity and a rational calculation of self-interests" (p. 29). By this, I mean I do not think child care and school are the same and I do not think one system is superior to the other—there is no need for competition or self-interest. I believe collaboration depends on recognizing the differences between child care and school, thus offering families interdependent support as children grow within these educational

streams. Gaztambide-Fernandez's structure for solidarity includes establishing relationship, obligation, then spurring action; I have designed this article within these three themes. To illustrate my perspective, I draw on personal experience and established research. At its core, this is a story about solidarity among educators, whether we work in schools or child care. Consider this an invitation to undertake a philosophical shift in what it means to be an educator.

## March 2020 – Flashback

The effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic finally reached Saskatchewan in March 2020.

*I was nearing the end of the winter term, working toward my MEd in Curriculum. My classmates and I had spent two terms thinking about the purpose of education.*

On Monday, March 16, the provincial government announced schools and school-based child care centers would close on Friday. The schools would close, then pivot to online learning and issue final grades two months early. The centers would reopen to provide child care for people in the essential services of frontline health care.

*In our office, calls and emails poured in as we supported our child care facilities with this news. Why were schools unsafe while centres were safe? Do teachers matter more than ECEs?*

Amid the panic and uncertainty of those early days, the mantra “we’re all in this together” appeared on my social media feed, in the windows of closed businesses and even in conversations with colleagues.

*And for a while, I believed this hopeful affirmation. True solidarity, one of care and respect for each other regardless of situation or circumstance, is one of my deepest desires.*

Yet, as businesses stopped taking cash, affecting people without debit or credit, as toilet paper was hoarded by people with access to vehicles and storage space, and as office employees brought their equipment home while mass unemployment loomed for the service industry, the degree to which we were “in this together” seemed more dependent on socioeconomic factors than solidarity. Within weeks, “essential services” had expanded to include wage earners who were essential to the economy, who needed to leave their houses to sell everything from groceries to deck lumber—and they all needed child care.

At the time, my partner and I had one child in Grade 2 and one in child care. Our school and center were closing; we were scrambling to shift to remote work and online learning, yet we needed to be physically present in the office during the week of March 16. Our children needed to be cared for, so we continued to take them to school and the center. Family, our other child care option, had been removed by the then-unknowns of Covid-19. Amid the anxiety, guilt set in. We wished we could do it differently, but we needed them to be in a safe place with caring adults. On Wednesday, I received an email from our daughter's principal, addressed to the few parents who continued to send their children. The impending school closure was noted followed by the advice that as there was “nothing of educational value happening in the schools,” and it was best to keep the children home (Personal correspondence, March 18, 2020).

*I had advised the school of our situation, so this email surprised me; I felt judged and criticized for not being able to be home with our daughter.*

Looking back, I am sure the principal was doing their best to support their teachers. Yet at our school-based center, each day our younger daughter was welcomed with a smile and continued to engage in play-based inquiry. I wondered why spending time with a teacher who was no longer following a set curriculum was necessarily void of educational value.

A year later, in a CTV interview, Don Giesbrecht, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Child Care Federation, reflected,

We know that child care has been essential since the beginning of Covid-19, we know that governments do not want to shut down child care the way they shut down school. They know that . . . child care centres have to remain open so that families are economically viable. (Somos, 2021)

In the March 2020 scramble of school closures, a conversation resurfaced regarding the basic aspect of child care within the school system. A quick internet search of the words “teachers not daycare” results in hundreds of articles and blog posts where teachers assert why they do not equate their work with daycare. Bachelor’s or master’s degrees are noted—just as I did in the opening of this paper as a means of establishing academic credibility.

*If I were writing this before March 2020, I would exercise my nearly two decades of practice in dispelling myths and assumptions of child care. However, when I read those articles with the lens provided by my Covid-19 context, I see the underlying messages resting on a compulsion to reinforce public respect for the people who are educating young children.*

I wondered where this division of school versus child care began, so I further examined the history of school and child care in Canada, drawing heavily from Larry Prochner’s (2000) chapter, *A History of Early Education and Child Care in Canada, 1820-1966*, found in the book *Early Childhood Care and Education in Canada*. Interestingly, the dismissive “not child care” stance can be seen as early as 1921 as, during a debate over closing Edmonton school-based Kindergartens due to a funding shortage, one parent noted, “Our Kindergarten teachers are well trained in particular work, and the average Canadian mother has more intelligence than to regard a Kindergarten as a ‘Day Nursery’” (Madill, 1921, as cited in Prochner, 2000, p. 36).

## Relationship: Origin Stories

The institutions of public schooling and child care emerged from the same source—the economy (Prochner, 2000). Both institutions are linked to urbanization and the economic shift from a family’s reliance on independent trade or subsistence farming and crop sales to reliance on wage earning. From around 1860 to the early 1920s, the large-scale removal and processing of trees, coal, minerals, and other natural resources prompted colonial settlement patterns of Europeans immigrating to Canada. In many cases, urbanization and immigration removed families from their multigenerational supports. Industrialization resulted in most people working waged labor with profits retained by a small number

of land and factory owners (Tucker, 1988; Prochner, 2000; *Industrialization in Canada*, 2017). Though owners were prosperous, the low wages paid to employees did not adequately compensate them for their time spent in dangerous factories, mines, and farms. Wage earners, more commonly known as the working class (Frank, 2015), lived in poverty, necessitating the employment of all capable family members, including the children. Children were either earning wages, or, without older relatives to step in, were caring for younger siblings or left on their own (Prochner, 2000; Frank, 2015). In Britain and throughout the British Colonies, the upper and middle classes of the time viewed poverty as a moral failing. There was a perception that people who worked for wages and lived in poverty did so because they were unskilled and uneducated. Wage earning parents were then believed to be choosing to expose their children to unsafe conditions simply because of ignorance.

*Through a deconstructionist lens that I am privileged to adopt a century and a half later, I consider how life today would be different if employers in 1882 had envisioned ways to make the work less dangerous rather than more hazardous for increased speed and profit. I imagine employers, policymakers, and citizens conferring over the correlations between low wages and poverty. I imagine parents at all socioeconomic levels being able to choose safe employment for themselves and high-quality care and education for their children.*

As factory employees and early unions pushed for workers' rights, the upper and middle class concurrently lobbied to limit employment for women and children in professions deemed to only be fit for men, like mining and factories. *The Britain Factories Act* was passed in 1883, setting basic health and safety standards for all factory workers and legislating only children aged nine and up could legally work in a factory. In Canadian provinces, similar legislation was passed beginning with *The Ontario Factories Act of 1884* which stated that twelve-year-old boys could begin working in factories and girls could join them at fourteen. Canadian children were permitted to work a maximum of 10 hours per day and 60 hours per week (Frank, 2015). Simultaneously, the perception that parents were willfully endangering their children in exchange for wages prompted the colonial upper class to develop and fund formal institutions—schools or day nurseries—to house under-working-age children while their parents worked. In schools, children of working-class parents received instruction on subjects to aid them in becoming skilled, employable members of society, ostensibly elevating them above the low status of their parents (Norozzi & Moen, 2016; Oreopolous, 2005). In fact, many of the earliest schools were started by factory owners as a way of training children with the skills to become new employees and quelling parent/employee protests. In contrast, a 1905 report from the East End Day Nursery in Toronto illustrates the purpose of child care, “We come to the aid of people who, perhaps, might become paupers and possibly their children criminals” (East End Nursery, 1905 in Prochner, 2000). The benefits of removing children from the perceived negative influences of their parents—at least for a portion of the day—took hold; soon, along with the children of the working poor, the Canadian upper class designated other groups of children to be at risk and in need of Anglo-Christian social reform. These groups included the children of newcomers from non-English speaking countries and the Indigenous Peoples of North America.

## **The Beginning of the Divide Between School and Child Care: Curriculum and Funding**

By the 1920s, compulsory school attendance for ages seven to fourteen was legislated across Canada and funded by provincial and municipal governments as per *The Constitution Act of 1867*, which established provincial responsibility for education (Orlikow & Peters, 2013). When legislation shifted to require children of all social classes to attend, more schools needed to be built and teachers needed to be hired. As education became a significant portion of a government's budget, the financial value of education began to prompt regular debate. Alongside this movement to institutionalize vast numbers of children, the emerging fields of child psychology and curriculum development arose to determine how best to guide these future adults toward desired skills and aptitudes. Challenged to establish financial efficiencies in publicly funded education, leaders within the field of formal curriculum development intensified discussions to determine the essentials. Mathematics, English Literacy, and Sciences—required for employment—seemed undisputed, while the Humanities (Art, Music, Dance) were subject to funding. These debates served to both shift the purpose of school away from accommodating working parents and to solidly entrench the financial and social value, or return on investment, of publicly funded education and the value of teachers.

Meanwhile, wage-earning parents realized the practical advantage of having their children in school and sent their younger children, too, resulting in classroom overcrowding and increased cost to governments (Prochner, 2000). When younger children were barred from attending schools, wage-earning mothers were forced to either forego their income or to leave their children unsupervised. As a response, preschool programs were created, operated, and funded mostly by women's charitable organizations and churches. Though their educational programming varied, their shared goal was to intervene and counteract perceived parental deficits which were thought to result in crime, poor health, and political rebellion. As Prochner (2000) explained, an 1895 report from the Toronto Board of Education “. . . equated the employment of mothers with child neglect and used this as a rationale for providing Kindergarten as a form of publicly supported childcare” (p. 39). Societally, these non-school-based day programs for children from birth to age six were viewed as accessory to school and laden with moral judgment of working mothers.

Preschool education was very much subject to funding availability, as school-based Kindergartens across Canada were the first to be cut during government shortfalls. Charity-run, non-school-based Kindergartens and preschools were also closed when community fund-raising was insufficient. This underfunding resulted in a lack of consistency for teachers of young children and an unwillingness to accept a preschool position if a more stable job with older children was available (Prochner, 2000). The argument against funding programs for young children, which hinges on the argument that return on investment is difficult to determine, contributes to the perception of preschool—as in programs for young children prior to them starting Grade 1—as holding less educational value.

I believe, the questions of how schools and child care are funded and whether they have a formal curriculum are at the heart of the divide, as we see initiatives to publicly fund child care over the years directly linked to the parent's employment and socioeconomic status. Schools and child care began as a

way to give children a safer place to be while their parents worked. They also have origins of benevolent pathology (Boykin, 2013), founded in the notion that children are flawed and needing improvement that is beyond their parents' capacity to provide. Though schools and child care programs have not yet entirely escaped these origins, a lot has changed since the 1920s.

## **Obligation: Open Minds and Hearts – Understanding Early Learning and Child Care**

While many adults attended school and can draw on personal experience, Saskatchewan's earliest child care centres opened in the 1980s and 90s, so there may be adults who do not understand what it means to grow up in a modern early learning and child care program. I was once one of those people. Child care refers to the daytime provision of non-parental, typically, non-familial, care. Anecdotally, if a family member provides care, people highlight the familial connection and do not refer to it as child care. "She stays with my mom." "They go to Auntie's." My mom was a farmer and homemaker during my childhood in the 1980s and my sisters and I would stay at our neighbor's house if Mom needed to be gone during the day. As previously discussed, child care became understood to be a social support program for *mothers* who *needed to work* but did not have extended family to provide care. This distinction has continued through public policy (Carlberg & Budney, 2019; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022).

While schools are provincially funded through the Ministry of Education, child care receives funding from both the federal and provincial governments. Beginning in 1942, the federal government attempted to partner with provinces under the *Authorization of Agreements with Provinces for the Care of Children* (Canada, 1942) to provide child care funding for mothers involved in wartime employment. Though only Ontario and Quebec signed the agreements, the initiative was argued to be of national interest. It was the first time the use of child care was normalized, though the program was promoted as full day nursery school. This shift away from perceiving daytime care for young children as a dire last resort to a valued educational program was fundamental to the evolution of child care as early learning. Yet, once the war ended, the perception of child care as early education was hindered and complicated by both Western notions of class-based child-rearing—where the mother was at home and available to her children throughout the day—and by the mother-child dyad promoted by attachment-theory proponents John Bowlby (1951, 1953, 1958) and Mary Ainsworth (1962). Their early writings on insecure attachment highlighted potential psychological damage including emotional imbalance and future delinquency (Adamson & Brennan, 2013; Page, 2018) that could be inflicted on young children if removed from *their mothers* for extended periods of time. Though subsequent research demonstrated that children are capable of forming multiple secure attachments with caring adults (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Page, 2018), critics of child care focused on Bowlby and Ainsworth's early research. Critics highlighted the age (birth to 5 years) of the child and that they were spending time away from their mother; they did not differentiate between large-scale, live-in orphanages and small-scale, daytime programs (Prochner, 2000, p. 56).

By 1966, when the federal Canada Assistance Plan provided funding to provinces to restructure child care as a necessity for the employment of women (Department of Finance Canada, 2014), support was provided only as a social service for mothers who could demonstrate financial need (Friendly, 2000). In 1969, Saskatchewan's first policy for child care was implemented under *The Child Welfare Act*, by multiple departments within the Ministry of Social Services. In 1990, formal provincial regulation of child care began with the introduction of the terms "licensed" and "unlicensed." A program is licensed when it meets basic health, safety, and educational programming standards established by *The Child Care Act* and *The Child Care Regulations*. Parents accessing licensed care can apply for subsidy through the Ministry of Social Services; their monthly fees are reduced based on their ability to demonstrate financial need. In their examination of child care in Saskatchewan, Carlberg and Budney (2019) observed, ". . . rather than being a service to benefit all children and families, licensed child care was conceived as a piece of a puzzle to assist parents in getting off government assistance by allowing them to participate in the workforce" (p. 7). This conception is in keeping with the history of child care as intended only for children of low-income, wage-earning parents (Schultz, 1978).

Public policy reflects and informs societal views, including child care legislation which is defined by two governance models, either a split-management or an integrated approach (Bennet, 2011). In a split-management approach, two or more ministries are responsible for specific aspects of care or education. Split management can result in a fragmentation of services with multiple organizational barriers for families to navigate. The integrated approach places responsibility for care and education under one ministry; as such, funding and services coordinate toward high-quality programs. While the regulation and educational support for child care moved to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education in 2006, the responsibility for subsidy remained with Social Services, resulting in a split-governance model. However, a transformational change is underway that I hope will place this mindset firmly in the past.

In August 2021, Saskatchewan's Early Years Branch of the Ministry of Education worked with the federal government to negotiate and sign the *Canada-Saskatchewan Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement*. Among the ambitious targets of developing a nationwide high-quality early learning and child care system, parent fees were reduced and will continue to be reduced to an average of \$10 per day for children under six years of age. This is approximately the same amount a fully subsidized family would pay, so regardless of family income, parents in Saskatchewan have or will have access to an early learning and child care program. Though cost continues to be a barrier to some families and the split-governance model is not entirely dissolved, parents can now choose their child's early learning and care experiences in ways that are perhaps more similar to how they choose their child's publicly funded school.

It is important to note that just as not all schools suit the needs and desires of all families, neither does all licensed child care. Families are unique in their composition and there is significant educational and social value in children spending time with their caring adults. Elevating licensed child care does not diminish other societal structures of care and education.



## Action: Identifying and Incorporating Elements of High-Quality Child Care Into School

Curriculum is directed toward the self; it is about what the individual should know, be able to do, or about understanding individual experiences and fomenting an individual orientation *toward* difference. Instead, like solidarity, pedagogy is directed toward the relational and highlights the process by which we are made by others through and into difference. (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012, p. 51)

When I read Gaztambide-Fernandez's words, I think of formal curriculum's neat columns of indicators and outcomes. I think of assigning a percentage to a person's one-time demonstration of ability; at this particular time, they could demonstrate knowledge of a specific topic—isolated from other topics. I think of the debates over curriculum that were taking place in the 1920s and the 1950s, the push and pull of defining essential academic programs in relation to funding. I think of the attempts to define which publicly funded relationships held value (i.e., teachers of children aged seven and up) and which could be detrimental (i.e., non-parental care for young children of working mothers). In the middle of it all, is not what we teach, but how. Pedagogically, I hope we do not teach in isolation from each other. If, as Gaztambide-Fernandez wrote, "we are made by others," then we as educators have an opportunity for schools to be "made" by some of the most enriching aspects of high-quality child care.

*For a long time, I wouldn't use the words child care or daycare, I said "early learning program," removing "care" as though it devalued education. Now I promote care as it brings value to any educational opportunity. We learn the best lessons from people we care about and who care about us. We study topics we care about more intently and remember them longer. I wish I could somehow incorporate the word "care" into "school."*

Though multiple factors contribute to the quality of an early learning and child care program, there are three well-researched, seemingly consistent, factors in defining high-quality child care. They are integrated and of equal value: kinship, playful engagement, and interrelated content. I specifically chose these three because I have seen them in both school and child care and hope they are recognizable.

### **Kinship: Care and Reciprocal Learning Relationships**

Child care requires educators to understand education as beginning at birth (versus at age six). High-quality infant care depends on educators building strong relationships with children and their parents in shared attachment (Shore, 2016; Hammond, 2020). Educators teach infants the security of belonging, essential for brain and nervous system development, via consistent care and focused attention (Shore, 2016; Hammond, 2020; Garboden-Murray, 2021). Consistent care and focused attention are elements of love. "Care" and "love" are loaded words in English, particularly when paired with "school," however, professional boundaries taken too far can create barriers to trusting relationships with children, parents, and colleagues. Education happens within the context of a relationship. In a reciprocal relationship, all parties learn from each other. The educator has acquired professional knowledge, but assuming the child is a blank or broken slate devalues the richness of their lives. Honest, respectful, caring relationships lead children and their adults to feel seen, heard, and loved for who they are and the unique perspectives they bring.



Care as education has a long history with the work of Nel Noddings (2003, 2005), Carol Garboden-Murray (2000, 2021), and Magda Gerber (2003). More recently, Dr. Jools Page (2018) expanded on care within early education as “professional love.” Dr. Page’s research demonstrates high student engagement, increased job satisfaction for educators, and improved allyship with parents via a triangular relationship placing equal value on teacher-student, parent-child, and parent-teacher dynamics. Building caring relationships is not always easy and takes time; when faced with the time constraints of a school day, teachers may wonder at the educational value of building relationships. As Ruth Ann Hammond (2020) wrote, “If a child does not feel safe and settled, [they] will be preoccupied with the need to emotionally self-regulate and will not be able to benefit from even the most richly prepared, developmentally appropriate environment” (p. 25). This statement is also true for adults. In this light, Dr. Debbie Pushor’s (2015) extensive research on parent engagement and the encouragement to educators to “walk alongside” is viewed as an invitation to kinship. As educators actively take steps toward becoming part of extended family—even for a short period in a child’s life—kinship works toward diminishing self-interest and increasing a sense of community.

### **Playful Engagement: Versus Action and Consequence**

Playful engagement with materials, peers, and educators has been shown to decrease stress for children, increase their wonder/curiosity, and solidify new concepts (Ressler, 2019). Though “play” is associated with ideas of “fun,” being playful is not necessarily fun (Mardell, 2019) as there are often frustrating obstacles that can only be overcome with perseverance and alternative approaches. Boykin and Noguera (2011) explained engagement as requiring three components: behavioral (effort and persistence), motivational (positive interest, relationship-based), and cognitive (deep processing of information and higher-order thinking). Engaging in play, children draw on previous experiences and new knowledge; they test theories and explore relationships. Contrary to ideas of play-based programming being easy or less work for teachers, successful playful engagement requires a balance of educator input with scaffolding based on academic knowledge and relationship-based observation of the child. Teachers can adopt an attitude of playful engagement, attempting different pedagogical approaches in different situations, based on their knowledge of a particular topic and a group of students—learning and adjusting for success along the way.

### **Interrelated Content: Cross-Curricular, Culturally Relevant Commitment**

Practitioners of high-quality child care recognize children are continuously learning across structured and unstructured opportunities. Physical care routines—like helping a child settle for a nap—are rich educational opportunities for both the child and the educator. In child care, education continues in outdoor play, as humans are part of nature. In school, recess is often perceived as a break from learning and some teachers withhold it (and the unstructured play it affords) as punishment. Skilled Early Childhood Educators engage with children to present spirals and webs—cross-curricular outcomes across academic, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical domains. Spiraling, where academic concepts are introduced and spaced out (versus crammed), has been demonstrated to embed complex understandings

of interconnected systems. Webs create a visual link between stages of children's knowledge, highlighting the path of their diverse curiosities and their profound understanding of the world.

To offer developmentally and culturally appropriate scaffolding via webs and spirals, educators blend professional and personal knowledge in collaboration with the families and the community culture unique to the center. As the types of conversations and depths of opportunities for cross-curricular outcomes increase with age groups, high-quality child care practitioners collaborate with co-educators, community and family members, establishing the child's sense of belonging within their program as an extension of their community. When our eldest was about three years old, her educators had a pet rabbit who spent weekdays with the children in their classroom. On weekends, children were provided the opportunity to care for the rabbit at home. Along with the rabbit's essential information for care and feeding, families were given a book to document the experience and pose questions for the children to consider the following week. The book had been passed to many families over the years, annotated with comments from the educators, and was a rich source of information and entertainment. As a family, we read the experiences of many other families who were at the center as well as families who had come before us. Educators used the book to add to the webs, noting facts the children had learned from observation and attaching more paper to accommodate the ever-expanding questions. Not only were the children connected to the ongoing topics surrounding the rabbit, but the book prompted me to have different conversations with the educators and with other parents, and to connect and laugh in shared experience. Linking back to kinship, educators are changed via their interactions with the children, their families and their colleagues; the outcomes are richer for all parties.

### **The Hard Part**

I highlighted kinship, playful engagement and interrelated content as key aspects of child care because I hope they are familiar concepts to every teacher reading this article. The teachers in my life, who work in all grade levels, seek and employ these three aspects within the scope of their classrooms as they see the personal and professional value and strive to establish them as the basis of their pedagogical and philosophical approach to the provincial curriculum. However, these aspects are not universal. Often their strongest advocates will also undermine the value of their practice by noting, "It isn't really my job to...", "but it takes a lot of time to...", or they state difficulty in convincing their administration, their colleagues, or even the parents of the educational value. Stemming from historical concepts of child care versus school, I believe the perception of care-giving diminishes perceived educational value. Though these elements of high-quality care for children are known to lead to strong outcomes for children and families, because they look like child care, they lose perceived educational value in favor of more tangible, testable, academic standards. Within this mindset, as children progress to Grade 12, they are afforded less care, less playfulness and less personally relevant curriculum from their educators.

During my graduate courses, I was surrounded by smart, caring teachers who were passionate about their craft. Repeatedly, they shared experiences where care for a child was central to the story and each time, they concluded by brushing off their choice to deviate from a lesson plan to focus on care. Embedded in my heart and mind is a story shared by a classmate I will call "Carrie," who teaches grade

three in a Catholic school. Carrie had a student whose mother worked multiple jobs, including a night shift, and often was too tired to get him and his little brother up and ready for school. At age eight, he shouldered that responsibility. He was a quiet child who listened carefully and was always offering to help. It was Shrove Tuesday and Carrie's morning plan involved making pancakes with the students, incorporating measurement and fractions while discussing Lent. The classroom was loud with excited voices and filled with the delicious smell of pancakes, but Carrie noticed her student sitting quietly, not participating and repeatedly pushing flat a small tear in his hoodie's sleeve. Carrie read his posture as sad and preoccupied and was concerned. Carrie asked her teaching assistant to take over the griddle and went to sit beside her student. He bobbed his head at her when she sat down but continued to focus on his sleeve. Carrie thought for a moment then commented, "I see you have a small tear in your favorite hoodie, did I ever tell you that I can sew?" He shook his head once, so she asked if he would like her to sew it up. "It will only take a minute." He nodded, so Carrie went to her desk and pulled out the little kit she kept for her own quick fixes. He pulled off the hoodie and they sat quietly together, amid the bustle of the room as Carrie's careful stitches quickly masked the tear. Carrie gave him the hoodie, he put it on, ran his hand over the sleeve, looked into her eyes and smiled. Then he got up and joined the group. Carrie finished this beautiful story by saying, "I know the family doesn't have extra money to buy new clothes and I knew he needed the sleeve to be fixed to be able to settle into the activity, but it's not really my job to do that."

*I hear that as, "Even though there is immense educational value in demonstrating care, it isn't in my job description to demonstrate care."*

Care is foundational to education, yet when teachers feel pressure with student achievement, framed solely as success within the intellectual/academic domain, it is easy to see why care becomes a luxury. I envision a time when teachers will embrace and promote the aspects of child care within their practice. We are all caring for children at distinct stages of life; educating by building skills in their social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual domains. Now is the time for teachers and Early Childhood Educators to collaborate, acknowledging the unique role played at each stage of education.

## Conclusion

As a means of moving toward establishing educator solidarity across sectors, I have worked to describe the relationship between school and child care as being the same, yet different. By defending the value of school with the statement "not child care," there is a risk in undermining everything that looks like child care in schools and justifying the removal of care from schools. High-quality child care and the Early Childhood Educators who specialized in child development have much to teach the school system. Three years into the Covid-19 pandemic and nearly two-years into the national Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, now is the time for schools and child care to unite in solidarity. When it comes to the truly fleeting time we spend as educators in the lives of the children we teach, we ARE all in this together.

## References

- Adamson, E., & Brennan, D. (2013). Social investment or private profit? Diverging notions of 'investment' in early childhood education and care. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 46, 47–61. Springer.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1962). The effects of maternal deprivation: A review of findings and controversy in the context of research strategy. In: *Deprivation of maternal care: A reassessment of its effects*. (Public Health Papers No. 14), 97–165. World Health Organization (WHO).
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. N. (1978). *Patterns of attachment*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bennet, J. (2011). Early childhood education and care systems: Issues of tradition and governance. In R. E. Trembley, M. Boivin, R. Peters (Eds.), *Encyclopedia on early childhood development*, 1, 1-5. Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development.
- Bowlby, J. (1951). *Maternal care and mental health*. (Public Health Papers No. 26). WHO.
- Bowlby, J. (1953). *Child care and the growth of love*. Penguin.
- Bowlby, J. (1958). *Can I leave my baby?* National Association for Mental Health.
- Boykin, A. W. (2013). On enhancing academic outcomes for African American children and youth. In B. Bowman (Ed.), *Being Black is not a risk factor: A strengths-based look at the state of the Black child* (pp. 14–17). National Black Child Development Institute, Inc.
- Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. ASCD.
- Canada. (1942). Authorization of agreements with provinces for the care of children (Order in Council PC 6242). *Proclamations and Orders in Council Relating to the War*, 8. King's Printer.
- Carlberg, C., & Budney, J. (2019). *Saskatchewan's failing report card on child care*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Saskatchewan Office.
- Department of Finance Canada. (2014, December 15). History of health and social transfers. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/programs/federal-transfers/history-health-social-transfers.html>
- Employment and Social Development Canada. (2022, April 26). Public Investments in Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2013. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care/reports/education-care-2013.html>
- Frank, D. (2015, March 4). Working class history: English Canada. The Canadian Encyclopedia. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/working-class-historyenglish-canada>
- Friendly, M. (2000). Child care as a social policy issue. In L. Prochner & N. Howe (Eds.), *Early childhood care and education in Canada: Past, present, and future* (pp. 252–272). UBC Press.
- Garboden-Murray, C. (2000). Learning about children's social and emotional needs at snack time – nourishing the body, mind and spirit of each child. *Young Children*, 55(2), 43–52.
- Garboden-Murray, C. (2021). *Illuminating care: The pedagogy and practice of care in early childhood communities*. Exchange Press.

Gaztambide-Fernández, R. (2012). Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 41–67.

Gerber, M. (2003). *Dear parents: Caring for babies with respect, resources for infant educators*. RIE.

Hammond, R. (2020). Learning to trust the child's process. *Exchange*, 42(6), 22–25.

Industrialization in Canada. (2017, March 14). In The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/industrialization>

Mardell, B. (2019). Playful learning in early childhood classrooms: It's complicated. *Exchange*, 41(3), 53–56.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternate approach to education*. Teachers College Press.

Norozi, S., & Moen, T. (2016). Childhood as a social construction. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 6(2), 75–80. <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n2p75>

Oreopolous, P. (2005). Canadian compulsory school laws and their impact on educational attainment and future earnings. *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series, 1205–9153* (No. 251). Statistics Canada.

Orlikow, L., & Peters, F. (2013, December 16). Education Organization. In The Canadian Encyclopedia. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/education-organization>

Page, J. (2018). Characterising the principles of professional love in early childhood care and education, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 26(2), 125–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2018.1459508>

Prochner, L. (2000). A history of early education and child care in Canada, 1820-1966. In L. Prochner & N. Howe (Eds.), *Early childhood care and education in Canada* (pp. 11–65). UBC Press.

Pushor, D. (2015). Walking alongside: A pedagogy of working with parents and family in Canada. In L. Orland-Barak & C. Craig (Eds.). *International teacher education: Promising pedagogies (Part B)*. (pp. 233–255). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Ressler, G. (2019). Enhancing our work through playful professional practice. *Exchange*, 41(3), 66–68.

Schore, A. N. (2016, October 27). Modern Attachment Theory, the enduring impact of right-brain development [Video]. Roots of Empathy. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0sKY86Qmzo>

Schultz, P. (1978). Day care in Canada: 1850-1962. In K. Gallagher Ross (Ed.), *Good day care: Fighting for it, getting it, keeping it* (pp. 137–158). Women's Press.

Somos, C. (Producer). (2021, April 16). Growing calls to prioritize daycare staff, early childhood educators for COVID-19 vaccines. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/growing-calls-to-prioritize-daycare-staff-early-childhood-educators-for-covid-19-vaccines-1.5390297>

Tucker, E. (1988). Making the workplace 'safe' in Capitalism: The enforcement of factory legislation in nineteenth century Ontario." *Labour/Le Travail*, 21, 45–86.



**Andrea Van Vliet** is a parent, an educator, and a passionate advocate for identifying and dismantling barriers between teachers and Early Childhood Educators. Andrea's graduate work in Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan was deeply impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and further informed by the societal injustices that came to light. Andrea believes educators have a responsibility to infuse all interactions with respect and humility.