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Pedagogies of Difference: Equity and Diversity in Early Childhood Policy in Ontario

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Abstract

This paper analyzes approaches to equity, diversity, and inclusion in current Ontario early childhood education (ECE) policies, examining both the intents of the policies and their implications for practice viewed through the lens of equity theory. The results of this analysis indicate that there is a range of equity approaches evident in ECE policies and that these approaches differ in significant ways. There are also differences within individual policies, such as variations in how equitable and inclusive learning environments are defined. In general, the philosophies of the policies speak more directly to anti-discrimination and categories of difference than the specific curriculum outcomes. The intent in presenting this analysis is to demonstrate how considerations of equity theory can help to clarify equity policy intent. In this way, the authors hope to encourage further dialogue around inclusion and equity policy in ECE programs so that these policies may provide direction and support to ECE practitioners who endeavour to offer optimal learning spaces within which all children can grow and belong.

This paper employs policy analysis to argue for increased levels of dialogue surrounding definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusive practices in Ontario's early childhood education (ECE) programs and related policies. It is important to investigate how these terms appear in policy because the specificity of these key definitions has implications for practice, and the degree of coherence with respect to how these terms are defined, both within and across texts, has implications for educators endeavouring to work within policy guidelines. In addition, it is possible for inclusion to be appropriated to an agenda in "shallow ways" that do not promote changes in student outcomes for traditionally disadvantaged groups (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015). It is also possible for equity policy implementation to be contested because it is seen to be advancing the cause of one specific interest group over another (e.g., Mitchell, 2012). Employing a "contemporary policy analysis" approach (White & Crump, 1993) which is both deconstructive and critical in its design, and which is intended to encourage conversations toward greater social justice outcomes, we take a closer look at the policy intentions and the implications for practice in some key national and provincial ECE program policies and standards.

In addition, we examine the tools with which different government agencies promote and monitor their perspective of an inclusive and equitable educational agenda. Steer and colleagues (2007) referred to these tools as *policy levers*, defining them as "the wide array of functional mechanisms through which government and its agencies seek to implement policies" (p. 177). We consider their view that these tools are not neutral but are inherently political. The findings of this policy analysis indicate that equitable practice definitions in current ECE policies lack coherence, leaving *equity* open to interpretation. In light of these findings, we conclude our analysis with a focus on postmodern picture books as one curricular starting point to build more coherent (Beane, 1995) considerations of equity and inclusive practice in early childhood environments.

Purpose

The analysis of public policy is an important process and an essential element in a democratic society. Educational policy analysis is also a process which is value-laden (Fowler, 2004). A critical approach to policy analysis attempts to deconstruct normative agendas that can reproduce norms without real change. Our analysis of equity and inclusion in ECE policies lies within a critical and post-structural paradigm where policies are seen as "textual interventions into practice" (Ball, 1994, p. 18). Specifically, we examine how ECE policies have the potential to either perpetuate or interrupt longstanding dominant power bases that determine whose voices are heard and represented in early childhood schooling. In that sense, we investigate how, in Ball's words, "things stay the same or the ways in which changes are different in different settings and different from the intentions of policy authors" (Ball, 1994, p. 20).

To further illustrate our purpose in this policy analysis, we cite the example of the data wall – a visual display of students' reading achievement. Waitoller and Kozleski (2015) find that this data wall typically presents a "unidimensional projection of students' differences" (p. 22) rather than a way to acknowledge the different ways that students can demonstrate how they are learning. The data resulting from reading scores showcased in this way take center stage and precedence over other agendas, such as learning how to meet students' complex identities, needs, and strengths. In other words, the present dominant policy focus on accountability and monitoring of student achievement in schools *competes with* agendas for inclusive, supportive

learning environments that anticipate and plan for broad ranges of diversity. Assessment practices in inclusive education need to be broader, not narrower, to allow for multiple ways to demonstrate success (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2015), especially in the early years.

While it is important to examine how policies promote or disrupt the reproduction of practices that label and segregate students who are somehow different from the traditionally dominant cultures in school, it is also important to consider how key terms are defined. We argue that analysis of how equity, diversity, and inclusion are defined, described, expanded upon, or missed in ECE and related policies is intensely significant for its impact on many aspects of childhood development. In our analysis we seek evidence of a commitment to more inclusive student learning and ECE program outcomes such as: developing a positive sense of self; feeling recognized and accepted; and the building of optimal bridges of communication and respect between the family, the home, and early childhood educators. This type of scrutiny of equity and inclusion in ECE policy has not, to date, had substantial attention, although the issues are important.

New Approaches: Promising Theoretical Considerations

Equity and inclusion theory can support the re-examination of current programs and policies, prompt philosophical shifts, and encourage us to not only build on previous policies but actually think differently. We model this by reviewing theoretical approaches which could shift some of the current equity and diversity policy paradigms: McIntosh's interactive phase theory (1990); Kalantzis and Cope's (2012) conditions of enablement; and O'Neil's (2010) teaching for social justice. In our musings, these theories are used as lenses to examine ECE policies and practices.

McIntosh: Interactive Phase Theory

McIntosh's (1983, 1990) interactive phase theory describes levels of awareness of equity, recognizing that different levels of awareness exist within persons, at different points of time, and on different topics. It was originally presented with an anti-racist focus (1983), and then to address both racism and sexism (1990). While McIntosh rejects the conceptualization of equity stages, she sees that, within persons, there is a pluralized awareness, and a continuous broadening of understandings. A person may have a very open position to one equity area and a closed position on another. According to McIntosh (1990), Phase 1 thinking in curriculum is mono-cultural or a single (dominant) system perspective which "is blind to its own cultural specificity" (para. 4). Phase 1 thinking has become so normalized that it is unquestioned. Students expect that the people in books, posters, stories, and songs will have similar backgrounds. Students expect to learn about the dominant perspective - other races, classes, and groups are seen in relation to the dominant group (McIntosh, 1990). To Battiste (2002), this single culture (Eurocentric) curriculum makes sweeping assumptions about the origins of the alphabet and numbering systems, dates, decimals, and scientific origins, which denies other ways of knowing about the world such as Indigenous knowledge. In an ECE classroom, Phase 1 thinking might also be characterized by assumptions about gender binaries and gender roles that go unquestioned; the stories, games, and songs are mono-cultural; and the physical education program might be designed only for those children who are physically competent.

According to McIntosh, in Phase 2 curriculum, there is awareness of others but only relative to the dominant group. Phase 2 is characterized by a few famous exceptions, such as Black History month, or celebrating a child's culture or food as exceptional or different from that of the

rest of the class. For Phase 3 thinking, there is encouragement to examine problems or issues, such as the absence of other races or cultures in the curriculum. We extrapolate this to include recognition of what is missing in curriculum planning for ECE such as the recognition of multiple forms of families, multiple genders, different socio-economic realities, and certain groups' histories within the curriculum. In contrast, Phase 4 curriculum recognizes everyone's lives, cultures, and histories as important. Phase 5 thinking, or the cloudy vision, according to McIntosh, is the inclusive world which has not yet been invented, where the most difficult questions are asked, such as if we should be spending our time making our lives more comfortable or focusing on mending the earth. In summary, McIntosh sees these curricular phases as evolutionary steps toward designing learning that is more inclusive, and the recognition that there are *plural, equally valid* ways of seeing the world that have not yet been recognized in curriculum.

In our view, McIntosh's phase theory is neither a checklist nor a continuum, but a reminder of the many ways that children can see the world and be in it. In an ECE program, considerations of interactive phase theory encourage us to question whose stories are told at story time and whose folktales and folksongs are taught (valued). This includes asking ourselves what kind of culture is represented in the classroom celebrations, the dress up center, and the kitchen, and which cultures are featured in the books that are used in the class. It also includes a prompt to ask which kinds of families are represented in the posters and stories, and whose cultures are acknowledged during field trips and school assemblies. What is encouraging about McIntosh's interactive phase theory is the recognition that the inclusive world she invites educators to create has not yet been invented, and we are all on the journey to find it.

Kalantzis and Cope: Enabling Environments and the Complexity of Diversity

A different but equally broad theoretical approach to inclusion is described by Kalantzis and Cope (2012). They acknowledge that new learning goes beyond recognizing differences, but argue also that these differences will continue to shift as groups are continuously defined and redefined in relation to each other. Our present society is dynamic, and as Kalantzis and Cope point out, differences *within* or *among* groups may quite likely exceed the degrees of difference *between* groups. They encourage a re-examination of earlier, more traditional group categories, which might have been helpful to understand history and experience in the past, but that can be over-simplified and counterproductive in the present. Rather than rely on earlier classifications (such as gender, race, and sexuality), Kalantzis and Cope (2012) invite educators to consider how we are differently-abled, and have different body forms and affinities. In other words, our divergence is dynamically changing.

Following this logic, Kalantzis and Cope discourage measuring deficits against a norm, because, as people, we all possess complex mixes of abilities. Rather than classifying a person as *disabled*, they suggest that schools should instead shoulder the responsibility to provide the "conditions for their enablement" (p. 161). We take this to mean, for example, that an early childhood educator might provide smell and touch centers in an ECE classroom for all children, while subtly addressing the needs of those students who require this stimulation. Similarly, Kalantzis and Cope encourage schools to recognize that children come from a wide range of types of families, and schools should be prepared to engage students and their families regardless of their home world and circumstances. They argue that:

The gap between the child's lifeworld experience and the culture of the school should not disadvantage them. The school cannot change the child's lifeworld experience. It can, however, build an inclusive school and culture that at least reduces lifeworld distance as a variable affecting learner outcomes. (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 172)

In summary, then, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) argue persuasively that while earlier school experiences focused on assimilation and sometimes exclusion, within new inclusion paradigms, corporeal differences should not translate to disadvantage for students. Multilayered, divergent children are *expected* and *planned for* in the school curriculum. Kalantzis and Cope (2012) believe that schools can lead the way by providing safe spaces where young learners can see themselves, their diverse home lives, and their diverse attributes (corporeal and otherwise) as welcome and the new norm. For some educators, this means dismantling established binaries of gender, and examining gender-specific practices and program elements, while continuing to seek activities and resources that are developmentally-appropriate. Other binaries and categories need to be challenged because they reinforce norms, such as the discourse which has traditionally surrounded *ability* and *disability* (Iannacci & Graham, 2013). The different ways that children's bodies have been seen as the norm or different also need to be examined and replaced by more inclusive concepts such as body equity (Robertson, 2014). These binaries or categories can limit children's potential and define them in dangerously narrow ways.

O'Neil: Picture Books as Windows on a Postmodern World

While early childhood educators often utilize picture books to build phonological awareness, develop comprehension, and model classroom community, picture books can also be used to help children develop an appreciation for diverse cultures and ways of *being* in the world. O'Neil (2010) reminds us that the authors and illustrators of postmodern picture books are persons who live within the present culture and use their picture books as a means to inform us and introduce new ways of looking at the world. O'Neil sees that postmodern picture books can help children confront traditional roles, classifications, and stereotypes and they can do this in ways that allow young children to feel secure while the concept is being explored. One example cited by O'Neil is the story *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* by Gaiman and McKean (2004), which tells of a father being traded for various objects. The story subtly explores the absence of the father figure in day-to-day parenting tasks while winding through a lively narrative. O'Neil (2010) also theorizes that postmodern picture books can help children develop a sense of agency around the changes that they would like to see in the world.

These theoretical considerations of equity, inclusion, enablement, and agency encourage early childhood educators and parent communities to rethink and reconceptualise categories that no longer make sense in a world where diversity itself is increasingly diverse. Principles such as universal learning designs need to become part of ECE programs, so that a child who uses a wheelchair can expect to participate in the gymnasium because the teacher has already planned for and adapted the activities. Equity theories which push the boundaries of enablement and ability create endless possibilities.

Policy Texts and Policy Levers: Defining Equity and Inclusion

For the policy analysis, we selected from global policy for ECE as well as national institutes, such as publications of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC, 2010, 2013) in order to understand how equity and inclusion in ECE are defined in global and national arenas. We then compared definitions from broader political areas to those in the ECE policies and policy levers in Ontario. The province of Ontario was selected because of its stated support of early childhood programs. Ontario is home to approximately 40% of Canada's population and it was the first province to introduce public kindergarten in the 1950s (Friendly, 2008). Responsibility for early childhood in Ontario falls to two ministries: Education, and Children and Youth (Friendly, 2008). In order to include policy from both ministries, we reviewed the Best Start Expert Panel plan (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth, 2007) and the *Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program* draft policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) as well as the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE, 2011) *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*. It was not our intent to provide a comprehensive review of all available ECE policies using the lens of the equity theories reviewed, but more to illustrate the range of policy texts and policy approaches.

In global policy, the United Nations (1989) has enshrined the rights of children to develop in contexts which are free from discrimination, “irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (Section 2). This includes children’s rights to be protected against “all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians, or family members” (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, Section 2).

At the federal level, because education policy has been divested to the individual Canadian provinces and territories, there are few national education policy directives, despite the growing awareness that Canada has become increasingly diverse. According to Heather Robertson (1994), because of these parallel education systems, there is a dearth of central (national) policy, leaving Canada in a “unique (if not perverse) status” (p. 30) in this regard. Until recently, some direction for ECE was provided by the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC), which investigated human resource issues, such as standards for childcare professionals and programs. Though the council was dissolved in 2013 when it lost its government funding, it published a number of key documents relating to diversity and inclusion in early learning. The *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* (CCHRSC, 2010), for example, includes multiple references to equity, diversity, and inclusion. These standards state that early childhood educators are encouraged to “accommodate differences in families’ parenting practices” (p. 33), and provide learning materials that are both culturally inclusive and anti-discriminatory.

One CCHRSC policy paper, *Inclusion from the Perspective of Diversity*, which was prepared in order to update the Child Care Administrator Standards (CCHRSC, 2013) defines inclusion from the perspective of Canada’s diverse population. This report also includes a pan-Canadian review of inclusion and diversity policies in ECE program policies and summarizes “fundamental similarities” across Canada in ECE program approaches to equity. Some of the key themes repeated across provinces include: the importance of acknowledging and welcoming the diversity of children’s families and caregivers; asking families to share their books, games, and songs; and incorporating key phrases from home into ECE programs. The report raises cautions with respect to *whose curriculum is advocated*, and also advises against assuming that

all cultures will want to participate in ECE activities considered *standard* in earlier times. In addition, the *Inclusion Report* asks key questions, such as:

Can the children identify with the people and families depicted in posters or pictures? Do the books reflect other cultures, languages, genders and lifestyles? Are the stories of other cultures and countries part of programming? Does the music played, the songs the children learn to sing and the games they play reflect other cultures? Are the dolls of different colour? Are there dress up clothes from different cultures in the play area? Does the play kitchen have containers of foods familiar to different cultures? etc. It is important for children to see themselves reflected in their environment in order to develop a sense of belonging. (CCHRSC, 2013, p. 18)

One of the aforementioned “fundamental similarities” across ECE provincial approaches cited in the CCHRSC (2013) report includes an emphasis on home and school connections. The report states specifically that inclusion and diversity should have “at their essence, positive, supportive recognition, acknowledgement, acceptance and respect for the differences of each child and their family” (p. 1). Of note, this report expands definitions of diversity beyond the areas of discrimination identified in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). The Charter in Subsection 15 (1) prohibits discriminatory practices on the grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. The CCHRSC report *Inclusion from the Perspective of Diversity* (2013) also includes recognition of children in aboriginal child care and considerations regarding child care for children living in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual communities. The report also advocates paradigm shifts; for example, early childhood educators are encouraged to change their perspectives to see the richness and growth that children can experience when programs embrace cultural diversity, increase cultural awareness, and encourage the growth of cultural pride in children. Again, there is an emphasis on *the assets* that children and families bring to ECE programs. Similarly, this report encourages ECE administrators to promote the use of assessment language that outlines what children can do rather than what they cannot do. In doing so, the CCHRSC attempts to define, as they say, a “new normal” which is *that being different is socially acceptable* (our italics) (CCHRSC, 2013, p. 4).

In Ontario, a curriculum framework from the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth, *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (2007) (referred to as the Best Start Expert Panel) includes equity and diversity as one of its six foundational principles stating that, “Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children’s rights, optimal development and learning” (p. 5). This policy’s position is that children and families need to feel that they belong in programs. They assert that the curriculum and pedagogy of children’s programs need to be planned proactively in order to promote meaningful engagement and full participation through anticipation of children’s differences (including, for example, physical, social-emotional, geographic, and first language) and that such programs optimally “encourage healthy dialogues” about inclusion and equity (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth, 2007, p. 11). Specifically, they recommend that *assumptions* with respect to culture, gender, ability, or socio-economic status need to be addressed, and that every family’s linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds should be considered in planning. This report contains only recommendations and does not therefore have the weight of a policy which requires compliance.

In comparison, policy levers *do* require compliance, such as policies delineating required learning outcomes from programs, and/or standards of practice for ECE educators. One of the

policy levers we reviewed was the Ontario *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* for early childhood educators (CECE, 2011), which includes standards of practice on topics such as care, learning environments, professional knowledge, professional relationships, and confidentiality. Central themes in the document include responsibilities to children, to families, to the ECE community, and to society. *Equity* is mentioned once in Standard 1 (Caring Relationships) in the context of relationships with families, stating that, “Early Childhood Educators establish professional and caring relationships with children and families. They engage both children and their families by being sensitive and respectful of diversity, equity and inclusion” (p. 13). *Equity* is defined in the glossary as an “inclusive approach to practice which creates an early learning environment that recognizes, values and builds on the diversity of each child and family” (CECE, 2011, p. 30). This creates an internal policy disconnect as the glossary definition differs from the wording in the Standards of Practice. Key words in the Standards of Practice include *sensitive* and *respectful* - adjectives. The glossary definition speaks to *recognizing, valuing, and building upon diversity*, which are all actions reflective of a higher level of intentionality to address equity in the classroom.

Within the same Standards of Practice (CECE, 2011), the word *inclusion* is cited in the standard above as well as in the following statement, “Early Childhood Educators support children in culturally, linguistically and developmentally sensitive ways and provide caring, stimulating and respectful opportunities for learning and care that are welcoming to children and their families, within an inclusive, well-planned and structured environment.” (p. 17). Once again, *inclusion* is defined in more detail in the Glossary section of the policy as:

An approach to practice in early learning and care settings where all children are accepted and served within a program and where each child and family experiences a sense of belonging and no child or family is stigmatized or marginalized. Inclusion means to bring people in, rather than to exclude them – in thought, word or deed. (p. 30)

This definition moves beyond *respectful* to call on early childhood educators to practice anti-discrimination and anti-oppression approaches. It is interesting to note that the definition of inclusion in the Standards mirrors that of the *Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators* from CCHRSC (2010). The CECE (2011) Standards of Practice also make reference to the unique characteristics and developmental milestones of individual children, and an acknowledgement that children learn differently.

A second policy reviewed for its approaches to equity, diversity, and inclusion is the *Full-Day Early Learning — Kindergarten Program* (FDK program) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). One key principle of this policy mirrors the equity statement in the *Best Start* framework. Principle 3 states that, “Respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children’s rights, optimal development, and learning” (p. 37). Respect for diversity (Principle 3) is not included under teaching and learning approaches, such as literacy or numeracy, or within broad areas such as “social development.” Instead, Principle 3 is placed in the section entitled, “Some Considerations for Program Planning” which includes special program considerations for English Language Learners, Students with Special Needs, and Equity and Inclusive Education. This raises a question as to why respect for diversity (Principle 3) is not part of the regular program considerations but only in the “other” program areas.

The preamble to the FDK policy includes the importance of equitable and inclusive education that eliminates biases, includes an anti-discrimination environment, and has

opportunities to learn about diversity and diverse perspectives. The policy preamble also states that learning in the area of social development should include “a focus on sexist, racist, and homophobic behaviours” in age- and developmentally-appropriate ways (p. 44). This language, however, appears only in the preamble.

The message changes for the *musts* which are the curriculum outcomes, however, as these statements are less anti-discrimination specific. Children are required to “demonstrate respect and consideration for individual differences and multiple points of view” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 57). Students are required in addition to talk about events or retell stories that reflect their own cultural heritage and that of others. Missing in the expectations is the requirement for teachers to include diversity and anti-discrimination materials in social learning. There is no requirement to build in recognition of knowledge from multiple heritages unless those cultures are represented in the students or there is a student prompt. Once again, the language of the outcomes (required elements) lacks the specificity and depth of criticality which was evident in the program planning section (the philosophy) of the policy.

Findings

There are several findings of note in this policy analysis. In general, the ECE equity and diversity policy landscape appears to echo Friendly’s (2008) assertion that childcare policy and program directions across Canada lack coherence in strategy and philosophy. National and provincial policy directions differ in key ways, and also lack internal coherence, which leaves them more vulnerable to different interpretations in practice. With respect to definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion, our analysis indicates a similar patchwork of approaches. While there appears to be some recognition in philosophy that inclusive schooling means moving beyond respect and the acknowledgement of *otherness* to providing inclusion and anti-discrimination education in ECE programs in deliberate ways, these equity intentions appear to be buried in either the glossaries or the program philosophies, and they are noticeably absent in the required elements of policies, such as the learning outcomes.

A second key finding is that while significant work has been done to capture equity approaches in ECE across Canada, and to define the terms *equity* and *inclusion*, the level of depth and detail of the work done by national ECE networks is not yet reflected in the Ontario education policy documents. The national work on ECE standards is to some degree reflected in the philosophy and definitions but not in the policy levers such as the ECE standards and learning outcomes.

A third key finding of this policy analysis is that key equity and social justice theories such as McIntosh’s (1990) curricular revision, Kalantzis and Cope’s (2012) enabling environments, and O’Neil’s (2010) social justice approaches in postmodern picture books do offer ways forward for more inclusive ECE programs. McIntosh prompts consideration of whose knowledge is valued within a classroom, and encourages the building of programs where multiple perspectives, identities, and histories are acknowledged and valued. It is important for early learners to identify that the world is naturally diverse and that this diversity is expected and planned for. Similarly, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) encourage educators to see the possibilities and opportunities presented by students who bring different assets and different life world experiences to the classroom. O’Neil (2010) shows how story can open social justice spaces. These theories and others hold the potential to deepen the dialogue concerning the meaning of the terms *equity* and *inclusion*.

Implications for Practice

While the findings of this policy analysis indicate that the ECE policies contain mixed messages, research voices continue to press for change in ECE practices. Pahl and Rowsell (2012), for example, find that the view of the *home environment as a resource* is well supported in educational research, and they encourage educators to look for the continuity between home and school rather than the disconnects. Drawing on how home literacy and cultural practices can be supported in classrooms, they further challenge educators to explore home practices and bridge activities, such as multilingual text-making and the incorporation of popular culture into school and community programs (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012).

In a similar vein, utilizing culturally responsive teaching, Schrodt, Fain and Hasty (2015) created a Kindergarten Family Backpack project to explore books suggested by their participating families. Through discussion and writing activities, students and families presented a positive affirmation of self-images and cultures within their classroom (Schrodt et al., 2015). By engaging with inclusive children's literature in ECE classrooms and programs, young children have their home life experience acknowledged and they also gain further opportunities to explore freely their own questions about their cultures and families.

Like O'Neil (2010) we see that postmodern picture books create spaces where diversity and inclusion in ECE classrooms and programs can begin to challenge earlier categories of difference. For example, *Mama Zooms* (1993), by Jane Cowen-Fletcher focuses on a mother's ability to move quickly because she uses a wheelchair. *Shapesville* (2003) by Andy Mills and Becky Osborn focuses on dismissing corporeal differences because everyone has differences and positive attributes. Likewise, in *Zero* (2010), Kathryn Otoshi uses numbers to illustrate how it feels to not belong, and how we can reaffirm the value of others by acceptance. In *My Great Big Mamma* (2009) by Olivier Ka and Luc Melanson, a child acknowledges that what he likes most about his mother is her size and shape. *Spork* (2010) by Kyo Maclear features a look into hybrid identities and individuality through the actions of a piece of cutlery that identifies as both a fork and a spoon. In *The Black Book of Colors* (2008), by Menena Cottin, images are embossed and the text is written in braille, acknowledging that differently-abled students will read the book, and leading children to use their sense of touch to explore the world around them.

There are also wonderful children's books that feature diversity as the norm and discard earlier categories of difference. For example, *All the Colours of the Earth* (1994) by Sheila Hamanaka talks about all the diverse ways that children's hair and skin can be different, and provides messages such as, "Children come in all the colours of love" (p. 17). *I Like Myself* (2010) by Karen Beaumont is another example of how diversity builds self-esteem. There are also many books which feature the diverse range of ways that families "are" in Canadian society such as *Families* by Susan Kuklin (2006) which tells about how 14 children identify themselves within their families. Through the deliberate inclusion of these and other similar books, an ECE curriculum can move toward fuller, richer forms of inclusion where difference is not just respected and acknowledged, but diversity is expected, celebrated, and planned for. Through children's literature and through children's questions and discussion, new learning happens in ways that are not forced but are developmentally-appropriate and a part of childhood.

Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to show that there are subtle but powerful differences within and among current policies that leave equitable practices in ECE classrooms more vulnerable to

interpretation. Because of these differences between program philosophies and policy levers (such as standards and outcomes), the policies lack coherence. We have also attempted to demonstrate that careful considerations of theory can assist in coming to understandings of inclusive classrooms that are less confined by outdated categories of difference. In addition, we have shown that postmodern children's picture books can provide multiple examples of diversity as the norm and support students with new ways to feel included.

We recognize that the process of policy change is not going to be easy. Policy authors may come from life worlds where areas of privilege are present, and understanding the life experiences of those who have been less acknowledged in traditional curriculum is not a simple task. We recognize also that pedagogies of difference are, to a certain degree, counter-cultural because they are essentially counter-hegemonic. Yet, we are encouraged by curriculum and pedagogy theorists, authors, educators, and policy writers who can see ways forward to make early schooling more welcoming, inclusive, and transformative. They invite us to make space for more dialogue along these promising directions.

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