

Coaching & Mentoring CONNECTIONS

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Our goal is to provide you with practical, inspiring resources to support your work and professional growth in the early learning and child care field.

Welcome to the January 2026 edition of the ECCDC Coaching and Mentoring newsletter. Diversity Equity and Inclusion or EDI is a term that has become part of our vocabulary in recent years, with culturally responsive practices becoming a buzz phrase. DEI can be referred to as an overall goal and guiding framework, with culturally responsive practices being a method or tool used to support diversity, equity and inclusion. In this issue of the coaching and mentoring connections newsletter we will be focusing on how educators can incorporate culturally responsive practices within their programs and programming.

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Spotlight on

Culturally Responsive Practices in Early Childhood Education

Along with families, early childhood educators play a significant role in supporting the social and emotional development of young children, setting the foundation for their social and emotional development. In the past, school readiness was thought of in terms of children knowing their ABCs, 1-2-3s, colours, and so on, but now we are reframing school readiness and thinking of school readiness in terms of whole child readiness for school including social-emotional, attentional, and cognitive skills. By having SEL interwoven - rather than seeing it as an extra - within an early learning and child care program it can go a long way to getting children 'ready' for school and future life.

In their practice guideline, diversity and culture, the College of Early Childhood Educators speaks to co-creating culturally appropriate pedagogy and developing culturally responsive relationships. To find out more please [click here](#).

Educators play a significant role in developing culturally responsive practices and can foster cultural responsiveness by:

- Creating culturally inclusive curriculums that reflect diverse backgrounds by integrating books, stories, and activities.
- Considering language inclusivity by supporting multilingual learners through bilingual books, signs, and communication tools.
- Including representation in the learning environments by displaying diverse images, cultural artifacts, and materials.
- Fostering respect for traditional knowledge by recognizing and incorporating Indigenous and other cultural knowledge systems.
- Encouraging multicultural discussions and storytelling - see below for an example of this.
- Observing and documenting children's cultural expressions and experiences.
- Promoting respectful and meaningful interactions between children.
- Facilitating community and family engagement by fostering collaboration between educators, children, families, and cultural groups and the sharing of cultural traditions and values.

Check out this useful Canadian Child Care Federation resources sheet 'families & practitioners: working collaboratively to support cultural identify in young children'. [Click here](#) to access the document.

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Example of Culturally Responsive Learning in Action

Activity: Cultural Storytelling and Music Exploration		
Learning Areas: Language Development, Social Awareness, Identity Formation		
Step 1: Set Up the Environment	Step 2: Inquiry & Exploration	Step 3: Reflection & Extension
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Create a storytelling area with multicultural books and music instruments from diverse cultures.Invite families to share traditional stories or songs from their backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Read stories and listen to songs from diverse cultures.Encourage children to share experiences or family traditions.Discuss different customs, languages, and celebrations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ask children: <i>“What do you notice about this story/song?” or “How is this similar or different from your culture?”</i>Document learning through drawings, storytelling, or classroom discussions.Extend learning by celebrating multicultural holidays and inviting guest speakers from the community.



Also, check out this video on Building high-quality, inclusive, and culturally responsive early childhood environments. Click on the image at left or [here](#)

Why adopt culturally responsive practices in early childhood education?

- Encourages inclusivity and representation in learning materials and classroom activities.
- Supports multicultural and multilingual approaches to education.
- Fosters respect for diverse perspectives and traditions.
- Strengthens family and community engagement.
- Addresses bias and promotes equity in the learning environment.

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Research and theoretical foundations of culturally responsive practices

Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy emphasizes academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness in learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and encourages educators to build on children's cultural strengths to enhance learning.

Geneva Gay's Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory highlights the importance of representation and inclusion in classroom materials (Gay, 2018) and encourages a deep understanding of diverse cultural norms to foster equitable learning environments.

Links to Ontario's Early Years Frameworks

How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years promotes diversity and cultural awareness as key components of early learning and ELECT supports inclusive education that respects and integrates all cultural backgrounds.

ECCDC Blogs and Podcasts

If you would like to find out more about nurturing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in early learning and child care, check out these ECCDC blogs and podcasts.



[Click here](#) to read ***Nurturing Diversity and Fostering Inclusion: Creating an Enriching and Inclusive Early Learning Environment***

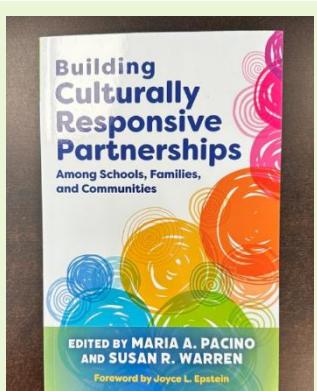


[Click here](#) to listen to ***Fostering 2SLGBTQ+ belonging within early childhood spaces - coming soon!***

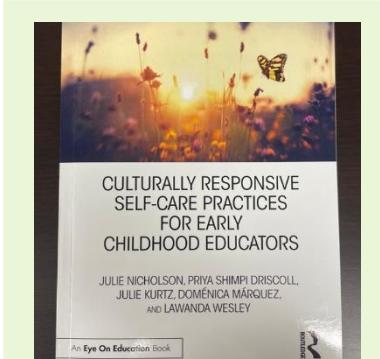
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Culturally Responsive Practices Books and Resources

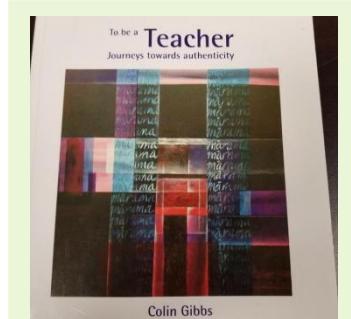
The ECCDC has many books and resources available to borrow from the ECCDC resource lending library. [Click here](#) to search the catalogue for resources to borrow or to purchase from ECCDC's E-Store, [click here](#).



Building Culturally Responsive Partnerships Among Schools, Families, and Communities by Maria A. Pacino and Susan R. Warren



Culturally Responsive Self-Care Practices for Early Childhood Educators by Julie Nicholson, Priya Driscoll, Julie Kurtz, Domenica Marquez and Lawanda Wesley



To Be A Teacher: Journeys Towards Authenticity by Colin Gibbs



Diversity, Equity and Cultural Celebrations: Anti-Racism Literature



Diversity, Equity and Cultural Celebrations: Exploring Canadian Inuit Sculptures



Diversity, Equity and Cultural Celebrations: Celebrating Pride

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Resource Delivery Service

If you're an ECCDC member located in Niagara, you can take advantage of our free resource delivery service. We'll bring materials right to your program! To learn more or to arrange a delivery, please contact the ECCDC at 905.646.7311 ext. 304 or [email us](#).



Online Resources



The Culturally Responsive Classroom A proactive approach to diversity in Canadian schools – [click here](#)



Education Buzzwords Defined: What Is Culturally Responsive Teaching? – [click here](#)



Culturally Responsive Teaching in Early Childhood Education: Four ways to validate and affirm young students' cultures in meaningful ways, which can boost their engagement and motivation – [click here](#)



The Cult of Pedagogy Podcast: Four misconceptions about culturally responsive teaching – [click here](#)

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Upcoming Professional Development and Networking Opportunities

Esteem has sessions, series, and communities of practice being offered from fall 2025 to fall 2026! [Click here](#) to view esteem. To visit ECCDC's registration page, [click here](#). Below are some sessions being offered with an EDI lens.

Every Family Belongs: Equity-Centered Practices to Foster 2SLGBTQ+ Belonging within Early Childhood Spaces, 2-Part Series with Dr. Dane Marco Di Cesare, Brock University on **Tuesday February 3 and Tuesday March 3, 2026** (webinars)

Ways to Carry a Métis Baby with Métis Nation of Ontario on **Tuesday February 24, 2026** (in person at ECCDC)

How to Get Second Language Learners Talking with Niagara Children's Centre on **Tuesday April 21, 2026** (in person at ECCDC)

Supporting Children Through Gaining An Awareness and Understanding of Sexual and Gender Diversity with Niagara Falls Community Health Centre on **Thursday April 30, 2026** (in person at ECCDC)

Understanding and Supporting Indigenous Storytelling, Music, and Movement in Early Learning Environments with Brock University on **Tuesday June 16, 2026** (in person at ECCDC)

Strengthening Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in All Organizations, 2-Part Series with Inclusivity Insight on **Thursday October 15 and Thursday November 19, 2026** (webinars)

Coming Soon

Our first ECCDC podcast of the new year will be released mid-January. Dr. Dane Marco Di Cesare of Brock University will be speaking about how programs can foster 2SLGBTQ+ belonging within their early childhood spaces.

The ECCDC podcast is available on [Spotify](#) and [Apple](#) Podcasts! Stay tuned - you won't want to miss these insightful conversations. [Click here](#) to listen to other ECCDC Podcasts

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Educator Well Being through Mindfulness

Many of us start off the new year by setting New Year's resolutions. If you would like to start the new year with focusing or refocusing on mindfulness, we have four mindful activities to reactivate your best self at work as you move into 2026.

1 - Exercise Regularly

Why not begin your mornings with exercise, especially on Mondays. Any physical activity in the body will help you increase your endurance, fitness, flexibility, and energy. Besides, it will also boost your mental, behavioral, and spiritual wellness.

Go for a mindful morning walk, practice yoga, try a Zumba class, or as little as a 7-minute workout to start your day. Beginning the day with some physical and mental exercise helps to support intellectual wellness and positive thinking.

2 - Practice Breathwork for Mindfulness

As Oprah Winfrey once said, *"Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure."*

How mindful is your breathing? Every living entity breathes to live. In the case of humans, it is how conscious you are about your breathing and how deep your breath is. It is because the quality of your life depends on the mechanism of your breathing technique. It provides you with clarity of thought and good health.

When you are stressed or anxious, take a deep breath and let yourself relax at work. Breathwork helps counter both psychological and physiological conditions affecting health and wellness. Spend up to 5 minutes of breathwork, be it at the start or the end of the day (or anytime in between).

3 - Start Your Day With Gratitude

William Arthur Ward once said, "Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings."

Being grateful can bring joy to your life and make others cheerful too. Make the beginning of your day a gratitude day.

In positive psychology, gratitude is firmly associated with greater happiness, and it uplifts positive emotions, relishes good experiences, improves well-being, helps us to tackle hurdles better, improves relationships, and more. And who does not want to be happy? Practicing gratitude supports a positive workplace culture.

A recent Forbes article states, "Gratitude is a basic human requirement — and since we spend most of our waking hours at work, giving and receiving thanks at work becomes pretty important."



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4 - Infuse Positive Affirmations

Stick a positive affirmation note in your day planner or on your mirror or send yourself an email to read before starting your day. Positive quotes will make you happy and help you achieve success.

It is your every step and daily commitment that counts. Therefore, to remain positive and determined, put a note in a prominent place with an optimistic message to yourself to keep you moving ahead in life.

References and Useful Resources

Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning (2007). *Early learning for every child today* (ELECT). Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010). *Equity and inclusive education strategy*. Queen's Printers Press.

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