

# MOBILIZING CONNECTIONS

## To Build Early Childhood Partnerships in Nova Scotia



Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners gathered at Mount Saint Vincent University to strengthen collaborations, promote collective learning, and identify ways to move forward in early childhood research, policy and practice.

This event was led by Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac, Canada Research Chair in Early Childhood: Diversity and Transitions at Mount Saint Vincent University and Director of the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre. Her program of research focuses on enhancing early childhood well-being by ensuring policy and practice supports families across different environments.

Support was provided by a planning committee which included representatives from Mount Saint Vincent University, Dalhousie University, University of Prince Edward Island, Brave Space, Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Margaret Wallace McCain Family Foundation, Recreation Nova Scotia, IWK Health



Centre, Nova Scotia Health Authority, and the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation. The event was facilitated by BraveSpace.

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This event emerged as part of ongoing efforts to build research capacity to support early childhood policy and practice in Nova Scotia.

Initial funding from the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation, Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation and the Les Lois Shaw Foundation helped to identify key focus areas of research.

## SYSTEMS MAP

Collectively, participants created a systems map to examine the complexity of supporting early childhood in Nova Scotia. Colour-coded sticky notes represented: Ideas/Programs/Initiatives, People/Groups, and Places/Organizations. Solid lines were drawn to show direct relationships, spotted lines showed indirect relationships, and spiral lines showed potential relationships.

The resulting systems map showcases knowledge and experience of participants. This activity was a playful way to start the day while preparing participants for open-minded conversations that embrace creative chaos and complexity.



# SHARING STORIES OF COLLABORATION

## **Toronto First Duty: Starting Small, Thinking Big**

Jane Bertrand

## **Walking a Tightrope Between Research and Community-Based Practice: Bridging Interests in a Shifting System**

Brenda Poon

## **Way Harder Than I Thought**

Joanne Schroeder

## **From One Small Meeting Room to Classrooms From Coast to Coast: The Development of the EDI** Magdalena Janus

## **Turning Pavement into Play-Based Learning Through Collaboration**

JoAnna LaTulippe Rochon

## **Reaching Back to Rise Above: Examining How Far We Have Come as People of African Ancestry and Seeing All Our Possibilities** Barb Hamilton-Hinch

## **A Story of the Ages: Government's Effort at a Different Way of Problem Solving for Population Aging with Cross Sectors, Generations and Cultures Collective Learning** Jocelyn Yerxa

## **Ahmed's Story**

Tayitu Sebisbie

## **Keeping Our Children in the Centre of Our Circle** Debbie Boyd

The formal event began with an opening prayer by Mount Saint Vincent University's Elder in Residence, Joe Michael. The morning was spent deeply listening to stories of collaboration, helping to build on existing knowledge from research and surface new understandings together before taking action.



Tell us a story of a time where you worked with people from different sectors/roles to collectively learn and find ways to support children and their families.



# LISTENING LENSES

**Power:** Where and how does power show up in the story? Who held it? Who lacked it?

**Inclusion:** What role does inclusion play in the story? What can we understand about its importance for the storyteller?

**Pivotal Moments:** What are the pivotal moments or breakthrough moments in this story? What can we learn from them?

**Resources & Sustainability:** What are the resources that show up in this story? How do these resources sustain the work over time, or not?

**Overcoming Obstacles:** What are the obstacles and challenges in this story and how were they approached and overcome?

**Synchronicity & Magic:** What happens during this story that pointed to synchronicity and magic?

**Relationships:** What role(s) do relationships, or lack thereof, play in this story?



Each listener chose a story and a lens to listen to that story through. This helped participants to listen with intention. When the storyteller finished sharing their story, listeners offered reflections through their chosen lens.



# LISTENING CAFÉ



Participants from each listening lens then sat together to discuss what they learned. Three key learnings were gathered from each lens, one written on each sticky note. Sharing the learnings as a whole group, sticky notes were clustered to highlight common themes across stories and lenses.

What did you learn about “working together to collectively learn and support children and their families” related to your listening lens?

## Relationship Building

- New relationships should be established, at-risk relationships nourished, old relationships repaired
- Trust and relationships are built over time
- Magic comes when we are open-minded, help support one another, nurture relationships, and connect with each other
- Clear, shared purpose strengthens relationship-building
- Communication supports relationship building
- Consistency of relationships and collaborations is key
- Resiliency

## Take Risks

- Magic happens when we seize the moment and take risks to implement real change

## Stories Matter / Process Matters

- Storytelling adds dimension by combining learning, characters, and relationships
- Global perspectives should be shared
- Listening lenses elicit possibilities, risk-taking, diversity, and personal and professional insight and ownership
- Shared elements appear within the diversity of our stories
- Reflections from various lenses affirmed and brought about new perspectives to our own stories

### Create Solutions Through Collaboration and Partnerships

- Ongoing collaboration and exploring what is next
- Collaboration of key stakeholders to create solutions within structures will move work forward
- Partnerships for problem solving, finding your way
- Spectrum of formality
- Leadership with a shared vision

### Recognizing and Using our Power and Privilege

- Power imbalance should be recognized and addressed, power should be shared
- Bias and privilege exist at the individual and systems level
- Self-awareness in recognizing power and privilege is critical

### Keep Child and Family at the Centre

- Children and families placed at the centre of all work
- Children and family kept at the centre of decision-making
- Wisdom from all communities to reconsider how we do things and make decisions

### Equal Voices, All the Voices

- Impact possible when decision-makers hear all voices at the table
- Magic comes when we are all connected, share resources in a circle
- Equal voices vs hierarchy
- Fragmented, complimentary voices with shared vision for collective action
- Ongoing communication loop with the front line is key



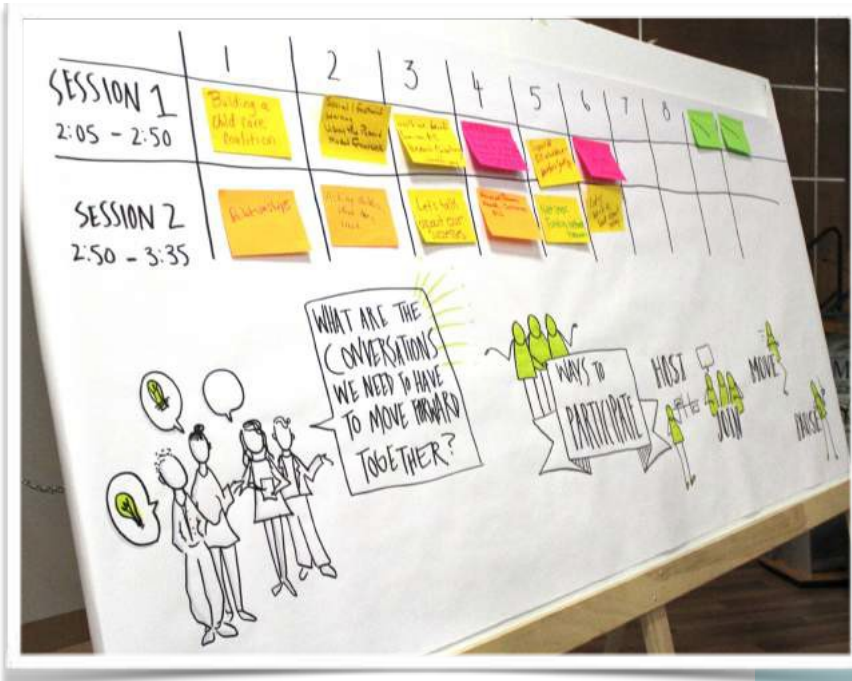
**“The process allowed everyone to find common ground despite area of specialty. Where there are so many [early childhood] topics, process enabled multiple to be represented and prevented hyperfocusing on a few (which would’ve alienated some people).”**

## LUNCH KEYNOTE

Jane Bertrand of the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation offered words of inspiration and encouragement.



## MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



What are the conversations we need to have to move forward together?

Participants were invited to bring forth topics of conversation to focus on for the afternoon.

Some people decided to host a conversation while others joined a conversation. Some people moved between multiple conversations, and others took a reflective pause.

Many potential actions and collaborations were discussed, as summarized below.

## What are the quantitative tools to allow us to measure early childhood development outcomes, policy and program impact?

- Identify the data that are required
- Create data sharing agreements
- Think about common data needs
- Recognize 'cradle to grave' in child and youth development
- Build an Atlantic Consortium



## Atlantic Canada Research Consortium

- Acknowledge few human resources to do research
- Include government / researchers / practitioners
- Explore maritime strategy for patient oriented research
- Approach the Offices of Research of Atlantic Canada Universities to identify who is interested in doing ECE research
- Build a SSHRC application to bring together the 4 governments and team of researchers to discuss what is needed

## How do we identify, assess, and use health outcomes?

- Embed quantitative health outcomes in qualitative personal stories
- Screen, assess, and collect data (clinicians, managers, researchers)
- Collect global measures of health outcomes
- Determine what data to collect





## Asking children what would benefit them

- Engage children’s voice ethically and with eye toward action
- Ask children reflective questions
- Determine how to get policy makers and funders to support play and arttherapy
- Build scaffolding for skills instead of over-focusing on one skill

## Support ECE Workforce / ECE Workforce Strategy

- Establish practice of nurturing in ECE field
- Investigate preparedness of ECE grads
- Define professional recognition
- Define professional practice

## Research funding for network

- Build plan for moving research into action
- Identify and create tools for building and maintaining partnerships
- Inspire new ideas and connections

## Relationships

- Identify and create resources to support relationship building
- Strengthen PD days for ECE
- Endeavour to start from a place of trust
- Be patient and generous

## Let’s talk about our successes!

- Work collaboratively with ECEs in regulation setting to develop common equities around work environment, salaries etc.





## The pyramid model for social emotional learning

- Clarify it is a framework, not curriculum
- Educate, expose, inform, help others
- Highlight importance of investing in adults to support children in social emotional development

## Using stories in practice

- Follow through with what the storyteller asks you
- Ensure people's stories are not used for selfish reasons
- Determine how to eliminate power dynamics in sharing settings
- Be certain good intentions are in place before storytelling

## Building an advocacy coalition on child care

- Recognize that power dynamics are not shifted just by doing research
- Foster mass mobilization to see a shift to universal childcare that will respond to children and families
- Investigate ways to surmount barriers to building much-needed advocacy coalition on child care



## NEXT STEPS

Further collaborative work is being determined. An online seminar series is being planned to continue the promotion of collective learning through storytelling. There is also discussion about the potential of an Atlantic-wide network to strengthen the collaborative work of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners supporting families during the early years. Additional funding is being explored to bring people together again to strengthen collaborations in Nova Scotia and across the Atlantic provinces.

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