

No Going Back

Creating the New Normal We Want

by Margie Carter

Let's take this crazy time to put aside our old assumptions and reimagine what education can be.

—Pam Oken-Wright

Here we are, past the one year mark of our world being upended by a global pandemic, palpably exhausted, both physically and emotionally. Our yearning for relief and a sense of security is now conflated with the idea of getting back to normal, yet how critical it is to uncover more discernment in this longing! Remember this: before it was taken away from us, we did

not like so much of what had become normal; we continually complained about the path our beloved profession was on. Now we sound desperate to go back. What do we really mean by this longing that we have confused with returning to normal?

We need our jobs, the experience of a learning community with our colleagues, the joy of being with children in their full exuberance. Instead, going back to work means adopting a whole new set of complicated constraints that further disrupts and disempowers us to live in this vision. Precious aspects of our work—holding children on our laps, connecting with families, engaging in lively conversations that provoke us to learn and grow—have been displaced by public health concerns and fragile budgets. Can we halt before we further travel down this path? Will we squander this chance to invent a new normal that

builds what we truly long for and need to thrive? How do we move forward with courageous decisions in such an uncertain world? What will it take to make time for dreaming, scheming, finding inspiration and other possibilities beyond the old normal with new masks and plexiglass? What ideas can enliven us, provoke us to think and discuss more rigorously?

Scattered across our ECE landscape are determined dreamers, mighty warriors, and courageous innovators. Put yourself in their company. Make time to reflect, replenish and recalibrate, tuning into the educator or administrator you long to be. Here is a sampling of what might get you on that path—not back to an unsustainable way of functioning, but forward into the creation of another normal, one that is full of possibilities. Consider these for yourself and your organization, explore and engage the thinking of others.



Margie Carter has lived in Seattle, Washington, for the past 40 years and has traveled widely to speak and consult with early childhood programs. She is a determined dreamer and advocate, an early childhood author and one of the conveners of the ROW Initiative.

✓ A Framework for Dialogue and Learning

Just before the added challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia, Canada, published its revised Early Learning Framework, a beauty to behold as an example of our ECE work reimaged, an offering we can all learn from. They set the stage for this splendid document by describing the context for the current work and purpose of a guiding framework for early learning educators.

“Educators work within the challenges, tensions, and possibilities of the 21st century. The realities of changing technologies, an environmental crisis, social and cultural

diversity, and righting the wrongs of colonialism are the context within which children, educators, and families live....The Early Learning Framework is an invitation to re-envision early care and learning spaces, education systems, and society... intended to promote dialogue about understandings of childhood, knowledge, education, and learning.”

Think and talk with others: How do you understand the current context and possibilities for our early childhood work to transform itself, in order to create the kind of world we want to shape and live in?

✓ The Rights and Needs of Young Children

Defending the Early Years takes us beyond the idea of ECE as a service for parents or a preparation for children's academic success, focusing instead on the rights and needs of young children. Develop action plans from their valuable resources and skills from their advocacy toolkits.

Co-director Denisha Jones boldly says:

"I know it may sound Pollyanna-ish, but I believe early childhood education can save the world! Not the current state of early childhood education drowning in the push down of academics and ignoring the power of play, but

my vision of early childhood education, which capitalizes on children's unlimited imagination, boundless energy, endless curiosity, and faith in fairness, to create a space where they can be free."

Think and talk with others: How do you understand the idea that early childhood education can save the world? How is play an equity issue? Which pedagogical approaches capitalize on children's unlimited imagination and curiosity?

✓ Revisiting Assumptions

Long time teacher-researcher/pedagogical consultant Pam Oken-Wright tells us not to squander this moment.

"This is an opportunity to step back and recognize how inappropriate to the times...and to children...many of our paradigms are. It is time to reimagine education, to put aside the assumptions that formed what has been education since the 19th century in our country.

"I want to help you see the 'one thousand moments' in front of you every single day you are with children and to know how to encourage them. I want to help you design your classrooms to support children's investigations and

representation. I want to offer you tools and strategies to help children develop a sense of agency that will astound you. I want to help you help your faculty (re)discover their own potential as curious, creative, innovative learners right alongside the children they teach."

Think and talk with others: What assumptions and paradigms need to be replaced as we re-imagine our early childhood settings and systems? What are the components of an organizational culture, and what pedagogical practices enable children and educators to learn together side-by-side?

✓ Transformative Dreaming by Asking "What if...?"

Coming together in response to the dire conditions the pandemic had created for their lives, a small group, San Francisco Educators for Equity, initially called themselves "The Frogs," remembering the fable that describes frogs in a pot of boiling water not knowing they are dying until it's too late. They asked themselves, "Will we settle in this boiling pot or will we decide together to hop out and turn down the burner?"

Finding themselves torn between their desire to serve their communities, their financial needs and moral commitments, they began reopening their programs, all while asking themselves whether they had to accept the even tighter restraints being put on their work. They began transforming their thinking and responses by asking a

series of "What if..." questions, arriving at new insights and action plans.

"We are gifted with an opportunity to use the pandemic to rethink the system, and to recreate our relationship with care and education. Early childhood educators are not martyrs. How do we move from 'managing' inequity to eradicating and removing it?"

Think and talk with others: Formulate your own "What if" questions in order to rethink the systems you are living with. What inequities are you currently trying to manage? What transformative dreaming can be developed into actions?

Resources

Carter, M., Atkinson, K., Burgaretta, M. and Kocher, L. British Columbia Early Learning Framework. (2019). Early Learning Framework - Province of British Columbia. gov.bc.ca

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Jaboneta, N. (2019). *You Can't Celebrate That! Navigating the Deep Waters of Social Justice Teaching*. Lincoln, NE: Exchange Press.

King, D. (in press) *Pursuing Bad Guys. Joining Children's Quest for Clarity, Courage and Community*. Lincoln, NE: Exchange Press.

Pelo, A., and Carter, M. (2018). *From Teaching to Thinking: A Pedagogy for Reimagining Our Work*. Lincoln, NE: Exchange Press.

Quinn, B., and Rodriguez, R. (2019). *Terros en el monte: Una Exploracion al pensamiento visible de los ninos/ Treasures in the Thicke: Exploring Children's Visible Thinking*. Lincoln, NE: Exchange Press.

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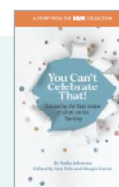
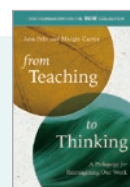
✓ Discover!

Early childhood educators are reimagining their work and thinking alongside children in this innovative collection of stories.

The *Reimagining Our Work* (ROW) collection is a series of stories written by early childhood educators that illuminate the pedagogical approach described in the foundational text *From Teaching to Thinking*.

Learn more about the ROW collection at:

ExchangePress.com/ROW



✓ Join us!

Our ROW community now has more than 500 participants! Consider joining a place to be heard, contribute ideas, engage in conversations, and share resources.

The ROW initiative is launching a new online communication platform. This platform includes:

- Our ROW Initiative Charter and key documents.
- Opportunities for online ROW discussion groups.
- Links to recordings of our ROW ZOOM gatherings.
- Articles and other suggested resources.
- Stories from ROW study for action groups.
- Updates and announcements from the ROW Conveners.

Learn more about the ROW Initiative and join for FREE at:

ExchangePress.com/ROW

All communications regarding the ROW Initiative will be done through this new platform. Current participants will also need to join the new platform to continue participation in ROW.

