



22ND ANNUAL
SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

POWER AND POTENTIAL:

THE ECE WORKFORCE
AS A FORCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

MAY 1, 2026

George Brown Polytechnic
Waterfront Campus
51 Dockside Drive
Toronto



ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Summer Institute is an annual collaboration between the School of Early Childhood at George Brown Polytechnic and the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the University of Toronto. The Institute brings together educators, system leaders, researchers, policymakers, and advocates to explore pressing issues in the early years.

This year's theme, ***Power and Potential – The ECE Workforce as a Force for Social Change***, highlights the essential role educators play as leaders, advocates, and equity champions in and outside the classroom. Through keynote presentations, panel discussions, and interactive workshops, participants will explore how educators influence systems, strengthen communities, and advance justice in the early years.

Sessions include topics such as anti-racist and gender-expansive pedagogy, Indigenous perspectives on quality, immigration and workforce diversity, equity-focused professional development, and integrated service models that foster continuity for children and families.

Together, we will reflect on the power and potential of the early childhood workforce to shape meaningful change and create environments where all children and families can thrive.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



OPENING REMARKS



Dr. Hassun Malik

Provost and Vice-President, Academic
George Brown Polytechnic

Dr. Hassun Malik joined George Brown Polytechnic as Provost and Vice-President, Academic in January 2026. Hassun brings nearly three decades of distinguished experience in higher education leadership, a proven record of academic innovation, and a deep commitment to student success, equity,

and community engagement. In this role, he oversees the academic enterprise, with a focus on innovative programming and academic excellence.

Hassun joined George Brown from Saskatchewan Polytechnic, where he had served as Provost and Vice-President, Academic since 2018, overseeing all aspects of academic programming, student services, applied research, teaching and learning, international education, and Indigenous strategy. During his tenure, he launched the institution's first Academic Plan, Innovation in Action 2021–26, and introduced the nationally recognized Surge Micro-Credentials platform. He secured more than \$200 million in government funding for a new Saskatoon campus and led the “It’s Time to Rise” capital campaign, raising more than \$70 million.

Earlier in his career, Hassun served at Sheridan College as Associate Vice President, Academic Pathways and Planning, and as Founding Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. At Sheridan, he developed new degrees and postgraduate programs and established partnerships with institutions such as the University of Toronto and York University to expand student pathways.

Hassun chaired the Pan-Canadian Micro-Credential Standards Committee, leading the development of a national framework adopted by Colleges and Institutes Canada. He also spearheaded the creation of Saskatchewan’s first Technology Access Centre for applied research in data analytics, AI, and IoT.

He received the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal (2022) for his contributions to higher education and community engagement.

Hassun holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Arts (MA) in English Literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) from Davidson College, North Carolina. He also earned an Applied Information Technology Post-Graduate Diploma with distinction and is a certified Institute of Corporate Directors Director (ICD.D).

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



MORNING KEYNOTE



WHEN EDUCATORS LEAD, SYSTEMS CHANGE

Rita Mueller

President

Northwest Territories Teachers' Association

Throughout her decades of leadership in the Northwest Territories, Rita Mueller has championed educators across federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments. She recognizes that a united educator profession is essential to strengthening and evolving education and child care systems. She has been a driving force behind early childhood system reforms, including the establishment of full-day Junior Kindergarten, which continues to deliver significant and lasting impacts on child outcomes across the NWT.

In this keynote, Rita reflects on how educators become powerful change agents when they are valued, supported, and equipped with the right tools. Through stories from northern schools and system-wide initiatives she helped lead, Rita illustrates how meaningful relationships, culturally grounded practice, and strong public oversight can transform the lives of children and families. Her message is both inspiring and practical—when we invest in educators, we invest in community well-being and long-term social change.



22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



PANEL ONE

ADDRESSING BIAS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

This panel helps educators identify and address bias in both their professional practice and the systems they work within. Bringing together leaders in early years system management, family support, and early childhood research, the discussion explores how inequities can be embedded in policies, funding models, and everyday institutional practices.

Panelists share practical strategies for recognizing bias, reflecting on assumptions, and strengthening equity-informed decision-making. The conversation highlights how educators can use their professional insight to advocate for more inclusive, fair, and responsive early learning systems that truly serve all children and families.

PANELISTS



Magdalena Janus, PhD
Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia; Professor (part-time), Offord Centre for Child Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University



Shannon Brown, B.A., Dipl. M.M., RECE
Manager Children's Services, United Counties of Leeds and Grenville



Nicola Lyle
Chief Executive Officer, Peterborough Child & Family Centres

moderator



Daniel Foster, PhD
Policy Researcher, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE, University of Toronto

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



PANEL TWO

LEADING INCLUSION FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE COMMUNITY

This panel focuses on the role of pedagogy in advancing equity and inclusion in early learning settings. Featuring leaders whose work demonstrates how educators act as change makers, the discussion explores teaching approaches that honour children's identities, respond to diverse learning needs, and create culturally safe environments.

Panelists examine how educators identify barriers to inclusion, foster belonging through daily practice, and extend their impact beyond the classroom by working with families, communities, and policy partners. The session highlights how intentional pedagogy can drive meaningful change for children and families.

PANELISTS



Christine McLean, PhD
Associate Professor and Chair, Child and Youth Study Department, Mount Saint Vincent University



Shelly Mehta, RECE, OCT, PhD
Professor and Program Coordinator, George Brown Polytechnic; Vice President, Canadian Association for Social Justice Education



Amanda Pont-Shanks, RECE, BECE (Hons)
Manager, Early Learning and Childcare Programs and Services, Métis Nation of Ontario



Amelia Rupsys RECE, Ba.Sc., B.ed
President, Early Childhood Resource Consultant Network of Ontario (ECRCNO)

moderator



Kerry McCuaig
Senior Fellow Early Childhood Policy, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE, University of Toronto

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP ONE

STRENGTHENING PRACTICE THROUGH POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Toronto Children's Services is a leader in measuring program quality in early learning settings and fostering inclusive environments. Drawing on their work with Toronto Children's Services, Maria and Meghan provide an overview of recent updates to Toronto's Quality Rating Improvement System, which now reflects updated inclusive language and principles.

These updates centre on respect, equity, and diversity, supporting educators in creating spaces where children and families experience a genuine sense of belonging and see their identities and lived experiences reflected. The session explores how these changes can guide early learning professionals in strengthening inclusive approaches within everyday practice.

The session also highlights professional learning initiatives offered through Toronto Children's Services, developed in collaboration with community partners, which support ongoing learning and growth related to inclusive practice across the early learning and child care sector.



Maria Troia, RECE (left)
Coordinator, Training and Development (Bilingual), City of Toronto

Meghan Ardies, RECE (right)
Coordinator, Training and Development, City of Toronto

WORKSHOP TWO

GENDER-EXPANSIVE AND TRANS-AFFIRMATIVE PEDAGOGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This workshop explores how gender-expansive and trans-affirming pedagogies can transform early learning environments into places of belonging and possibility. Grounded in her work as an educator and researcher in equity and leadership studies, Shailja guides participants in examining how everyday decisions and interactions can disrupt systemic barriers and advance justice in the early years.

Participants reflect on practices that honour diverse identities, challenge exclusion, and foster meaningful relationships with children and families. The session also highlights the importance of educator advocacy, professional voices, and collective action in building equitable early childhood systems.



Shailja Jain, RECE, M.Ed., PhD Candidate

*Professor and Coordinator,
School of Early Childhood,
George Brown Polytechnic*

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



WORKSHOPS continued

WORKSHOP **THREE**

IMMIGRATION, EQUITY, AND THE FUTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Immigration is playing a growing role in shaping Canada's early childhood workforce, yet the experiences of immigrant educators and the communities they serve often remain overlooked. This workshop invites participants to explore how demographic change, migration patterns, and workforce mobility influence early learning environments and the broader goals of equity and social justice.

The session explores the opportunities and challenges that immigrant educators face, the systemic barriers that affect workforce participation, and the role early years programs play in supporting newcomer families. Through discussion and reflection, the workshop highlights how immigration enriches the early learning field and how educators can contribute to building responsive and vibrant communities.



Yolande Pottie-Sherman, PhD
Associate Professor and Chair,
Child and Youth Study
Department, Mount Saint
Vincent University

WORKSHOP **FOUR**

HONOURING INDIGENOUS APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Quality in early learning is shaped by relationships, community, and cultural context. This workshop introduces an Indigenous-informed approach to the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI), grounded in Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing. It highlights practices that honour children's identities, support belonging, and reflect the interconnectedness of learning, land, and community. The workshop leaders guide participants in exploring how Indigenous perspectives can deepen understandings of quality beyond conventional assessment tools. Participants consider how these approaches can inform practice, strengthen relationships with families, and support more meaningful program planning.



Michal Perlman, PhD (left)
Professor, Department of
Human Development and
Applied Psychology, OISE,
University of Toronto; *Chair,*
Atkinson Centre for Society and
Child Development

Gail Francis, M.Ed. (right)
Indigenous Early Learning
Child Care Coordinator, Mawiw
Council Inc.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



WORKSHOPS continued

WORKSHOP **FIVE**

BUILDING SEAMLESS EXPERIENCES: EDUCATOR LEADERSHIP IN THE WATERLOO MODEL

This workshop explores how the seamless day model in Waterloo Region positions early childhood educators as leaders and change makers in creating continuity, stability, and equity for children and families.

The workshop demonstrates how educators collaborate across roles, bridge instructional and care-based practices, and strengthen communication to support each child's learning journey. Participants consider how a unified approach empowers educators to shape classroom culture, respond to diverse needs, and build stronger connections with families and school communities. Through examples from the Waterloo experience, this session highlights how integrated models can expand the influence of early childhood educators, deepen professional relationships, and contribute to a more coherent and equitable early years system.



Melissa Hilton, RECE, BSW, M.Ed.

*Extended Day Program
Manager, Waterloo Region
District School Board*

WORKSHOP **SIX**

SEEING EARLY, ACTING EARLY: EDUCATORS AS LEADERS IN IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING DIVERSE NEEDS

Early childhood educators will often be the first to notice when a child may benefit from additional supports. This workshop will explore the critical role educators play as early identifiers and advocates for children with diverse developmental needs.

Jane will examine how educators' observations, professional judgment, and relationships with families can support timely access to services. The session will emphasize strengths based and respectful approaches to early identification and collaboration, positioning educators as key agents of inclusion and social change within early childhood systems.



Jane Bertrand

*Program Director,
Margaret and Wallace McCain
Family Foundation Inc.*

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



AFTERNOON KEYNOTE



REIMAGINING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

Janelle Brady, PhD

Assistant Professor
School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto
Metropolitan University

Dr. Brady is an anti-racist educator, activist, community leader, and award-winning Black studies scholar. In this keynote, she explores how early childhood educators can act as powerful agents of social change. Drawing on her research, informed by the experiences of Black children, Black families, and Black educators, she reflects on how early learning environments can either reinforce or challenge systemic inequities. Through her focus on Black feminisms, Black mothering, and community-based responses to discrimination, she invites participants to consider how educators can create spaces that honour children's identities and foster true inclusion.



22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



AWARD OF EXCELLENCE



Petr Varmuza, PhD

During 35 years of public service with municipal governments, Petr has worked in human service planning and delivery. With the City of Toronto Children's Services, Petr managed service planning, policy development, information technology, and oversight of the City's

child care budget. He has participated in various task forces, including Toronto's First Duty, Ontario's Early Learning Panel, and several Child Care Human Resource Sector Council projects.

In retirement, Petr earned a PhD at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 2020 and has collaborated on several projects, including You Bet We Still Care, proposals for school board-operated child care, Knowing Our Numbers, and the Child Care Matters study. Firmly believing that having and understanding data is a much more effective strategy than hope, Petr's research focuses on equitable access to high-quality ELCC experiences, including examining child care deserts and lower program quality in Toronto's disadvantaged neighbourhoods.



22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES



Meghan Ardies, RECE

Coordinator, Training and Development, City of Toronto

Meghan has over 14 years of experience in the early learning and child care sector. She has worked as an educator and supervisor in licensed child care centres and previously served as a bilingual quality assurance analyst with Toronto Children's Services, supporting the French-language sector. She now continues her work with Toronto Children's Services as the training and development coordinator, where she designs and delivers professional learning, leads sector-wide training initiatives, and supports early learning professionals in fostering high-quality, inclusive environments for all children and families.

Jane Bertrand

Program Director, Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation Inc.



Jane Bertrand is a long-time early childhood educator. She is currently the Program Director at the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation Inc. The Foundation's focus is early childhood practices, policies and research in Canada, particularly in Atlantic Canada. Jane is also an Adjunct Professor at OISE, University of Toronto and participates in OISE's Flex Early Learning PhD program. Jane worked in collaboration with Dr. Fraser Mustard and the Honourable Margaret Norrie McCain as the research coordinator for Early Years Study (1999), Early Years Study 2 (2007), Early Years Study 3 (2011) and Early Years Study 4 (2020). In 2013, Jane received an honorary doctorate from the University of New Brunswick, for her contribution to early childhood education in Canada.

Janelle Brady, PhD

Assistant Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University



Dr. Brady (she/her) is an award-winning Black studies scholar, author, and activist-researcher focused on Black mothering, Blackness in early childhood studies, and Black feminisms. She curates and teaches courses on equity, Black childhoods, and social justice pedagogies.

She is the recipient of several awards, including the [2025 Provost's Award for Teaching Excellence](#) and the [2022 Viola Desmond Faculty Award](#)—both from Toronto Metropolitan University—as well as the 2021 Emerging Leader Award and the [2019 International Day for the End of Racial Discrimination Award](#) from the University of Toronto.

She is also the co-founder and director of the Downsview Advocate, a community-based newspaper in Toronto's north end, and is president of the Ontario NDP.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES



Shannon Brown, B.A., Dipl. M.M., RECE

Manager Children's Services, United Counties of Leeds and Grenville

Shannon is a Registered Early Childhood Educator with over 30 years of experience supporting children, families, educators, and communities through a wide range of early learning and child care roles. She holds a Degree in Sociology, a Diploma in Early Childhood Education, and an Executive Diploma in Municipal Management. Her professional background includes work as a kindergarten and school-age educator, site supervisor, home child care provider, EarlyON CFC program facilitator, and Early Literacy Specialist. She has also taught at the post-secondary level as a College Professor in both Ontario and Nova Scotia, contributing to the development of future early childhood professionals. For the past nine years, Shannon has served in the role of Children's Services Manager at the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, where she provides leadership in service delivery, system planning and management.

Daniel Foster, PhD

Policy Researcher, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE, University of Toronto



Dr. Foster's research focuses on early childhood education, labour markets, and education policy. He holds a PhD in developmental psychology and education from the University of Toronto and has led evaluations of national child care policies, including contributions to the Early Childhood Education Report 2020. In his previous role at the Ontario Ministry of Education, he analyzed large-scale education data to support policy development and system planning. His work has informed government strategies on child care accessibility and early learning, and he has co-authored provincial evaluations of flexible child care initiatives and studies on the impacts of early education policies on families and children. He is also a part-time faculty member in the School of Early Childhood at George Brown Polytechnic.

Gail Francis, M.Ed.

Indigenous Early Learning Child Care Coordinator, Mawiw Council Inc.



Gail was born and raised in Neqotkuk (Tobique First Nation), New Brunswick. She holds a bachelor's degree in education and a double master's degree in education, specializing in adult education and curriculum design. Gail has worked across a range of roles, including adult educator, education counsellor for youth, income assistance case manager, curriculum developer, and literacy resource teacher in a band-operated school. She has worked in the field of autism since 2010, including as an autism consultant serving the three largest First Nations communities in New Brunswick. Gail currently works at Mawiw Council Inc. as an Indigenous early learning and child care coordinator, supporting early years programs for children aged 0-6 through the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care (IELCC) Framework. She is also the project lead on three Indigenous initiatives, including the development of an Indigenous autism curriculum toolkit.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES continued



Melissa Hilton, RECE, BSW, M.Ed.

Extended Day Program Manager, Waterloo Region District School Board

Melissa has managed child care and school board–operated extended day programs since 2010. She oversees multi-site early years programs licensed under the Child Care and Early Years Act, ensuring they meet ministry requirements. A strong collaborator, she works closely with child care operators and school teams to provide high-quality services to families. She is committed to supporting the ECE workforce and promoting accessible, affordable child care. Melissa is also a part-time faculty member in the Bachelor of Early Learning Program Development at Conestoga College and a mentor with the College of Early Childhood Educators, supporting students and RECEs.



Shailja Jain, RECE, M.Ed., PhD Candidate

Professor and Coordinator, School of Early Childhood, George Brown Polytechnic

Shailja is a PhD candidate in Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies at Western University. Her research focuses on trans-affirmative and gender-expansive education in the early childhood classroom. Shailja is also a faculty member in the School of Early Childhood at George Brown Polytechnic. She has experience teaching a wide variety of topics, ranging from child development to social justice, anti-racism, and policy-based courses. Shailja develops gender-inclusive, practice-based workshops for the early childhood workforce and also serves as president of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario.



Magdalena Janus, PhD

Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia; Professor (part-time), Offord Centre for Child Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University

Dr. Janus is a professor at the UBC Vancouver Department of Pediatrics, the incoming Sunny Hill BC Leadership Chair in Child Development, and a former Ontario chair in early childhood development at the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University. She is also one of the core scientists with the WHO Global Scales for Early Development project that creates measurement and indicators of development for children under age three. Together with the late Dr. Dan Offord, Magdalena developed a measure of children's developmental health at school entry, the Early Development Instrument, which is used by communities to monitor the state of early childhood development in Canada and internationally. Magdalena's research broadly focuses on social determinants of children's health, with a special focus on children with neurodisabilities.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES continued



Nicola Lyle

Chief Executive Officer, Peterborough Child & Family Centres

Nicola Lyle is co-chair of the Early Years Provincial Network and CEO of Peterborough Child & Family Centres (PCFC), where she oversees EarlyON programs, licensed child care, and family support services. She has worked in the early years and human services sector for over two decades, bringing expertise in community partnerships and family engagement. Before joining PCFC, she held roles in child welfare and municipal social services.



Kerry McCuaig

Senior Fellow Early Childhood Policy, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE, University of Toronto

Kerry McCuaig co-developed the Early Childhood Education Report, tracking progress in early years policy across Canada. A co-author of Early Years Study 3, she helped pioneer integrated early childhood programming with Toronto First Duty. She has advised governments, authored key policy reports, and is a frequent speaker on early learning and care.



Christine McLean, PhD

Associate Professor, Chair of the Child and Youth Study Department, Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. McLean has been involved in early childhood education for over four decades in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. She has held a variety of roles, including college instructor, registrar of certification, child care policy analyst with the NL Provincial Government, provincial manager of the ECE program at the College of the North Atlantic, and, most recently, faculty member at Mount Saint Vincent University. She has also held executive positions with a variety of provincial and national organizations including AECENS, AECENL, the Canadian Association for Young Children, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, and the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. She is currently a member of the National Advisory Council on ELCC.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES continued



Shelly Mehta, RECE, OCT, PhD

Professor and Coordinator, George Brown Polytechnic; Vice President, Canadian Association for Social Justice Education

Dr. Mehta's work focuses on amplifying historically silenced narratives of students, children, families, and communities through anti-racist and liberatory frameworks grounded in counter-storytelling and strength-based pedagogy/andragogy. She is co-author of the Early Childhood Education Report 2023, and co-lead of the ECE Faculty CARE Collective at the AECEO. Her recent projects look at social justice and AI integration in education.



Rita Mueller

President, Northwest Territories Teachers' Association

Over the past 30 years, Rita has had the opportunity and privilege to work as a classroom teacher, guidance counsellor, and school principal, and in a range of senior educational leadership roles. Through these experiences, she has maintained a strong belief in the importance of both Canada's early learning and child care sector and the K-12 public education system. She also believes these two systems must find new and creative ways to work together to unify and strengthen the programs and services available to children and youth across Canada.



Michal Perlman, PhD

Professor, Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, OISE, University of Toronto; Chair, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development

Dr. Perlman's research focuses on quality in ECEC, including how quality is defined and measured, and how different dimensions of program quality are linked to child outcomes. She works closely with all levels of government to examine how ECEC quality measurement can be used for system monitoring and continuous quality improvement. Her scholarship also explores parenting and family environments and their influence on children's development. Michal has published widely in peer-reviewed journals as well as practitioner- and policy-focused outlets. Her research has been supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Margaret and Wallace McCain Foundation, and other government and philanthropic organizations.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES continued

Amelia Rupsys RECE, Ba.Sc., B.ed

President, Early Childhood Resource Consultant Network of Ontario (ECRCNO)



Amelia is an early years leader, consultant, and advocate with more than 15 years of experience in early learning and child care. She currently serves as President of the Early Childhood Resource Consultant Network of Ontario (ECRCNO), where her work focuses on strengthening the field of resource consultation and its role in supporting inclusive practice across the sector. Amelia brings a deep understanding of child care programs, special needs resourcing, and system-level collaboration, which informs her approach to capacity building and advocacy. She is deeply passionate about supporting inclusion in child care programs by promoting reflective, well-supported environments that enable educators to deepen and sustain inclusive practice. Through her leadership with ECRCNO, Amelia helps support the advancement of resource consultation and inclusive practice across the province through system-level advocacy, professional learning, and reflective practice, helping ensure children with disabilities are meaningfully included in their communities with appropriate and sustainable supports.

Amanda Pont-Shanks, RECE, BECE (Hons)

Manager, Early Learning and Childcare Programs and Services, Métis Nation of Ontario



Amanda has more than 20 years of experience in early learning and child care. Her lived experience navigating autism spectrum disorder within her family has shaped a strong commitment to accessibility and inclusion in the early years. Amanda has served as programs and services manager for early learning and child care at the Métis Nation of Ontario for nearly seven years and is a member of the National Advisory Council for Early Learning and Child Care. As a citizen of the Métis Nation of Ontario, with family connections to Manitoba, she advocates at both provincial and federal levels for Indigenous ways of knowing and for inclusive systems that ensure all children, regardless of their support needs, feel seen, respected, and heard in their learning environments.

Yolande Pottie-Sherman, PhD

Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Memorial University, Newfoundland and Labrador



Dr. Pottie-Sherman's research focuses on immigration, diversity, and demographic change, with a particular emphasis on how these dynamics shape Canadian cities. She is currently examining the intersections of housing, immigration, and care infrastructure, including the role of immigration in Canada's early learning and child care workforce. Her work has been supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and international research institutes, and she has collaborated with scholars across disciplines to inform both academic debates and public policy. A committed public scholar, Yolande has advised Global Affairs Canada on the International Education Strategy, delivered invited talks to the Canadian Bureau of International Education, and contributed to national media discussions on migration and policy. She holds a PhD in geography from the University of British Columbia.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



BIOGRAPHIES continued



Maria Troia, RECE

Coordinator, Training and Development (Bilingual), City of Toronto

Maria has over 16 years of experience in the early learning and child care sector. She has worked in diverse settings, including Care for Newcomer Children programs, Kindergarten French Immersion classrooms with the Toronto District School Board, and licensed child care programs. In 2017, Maria joined the Quality and Capacity Building Unit at Toronto Children's Services as a bilingual quality assurance analyst. Today, she serves as a bilingual training and development coordinator, supporting the early learning sector by providing professional learning opportunities for English- and French-speaking educators and child care professionals.



Petr Varmuza, PhD

Independent Researcher

Recipient of ECE Award of Excellence

Following his retirement from public service, Dr. Varmuza completed a PhD at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 2020, further strengthening the research foundation of his systems-level work. He has since collaborated on several influential projects, including You Bet We Still Care, proposals for school board-operated child care, Knowing Our Numbers, and the Child Care Matters study. Grounded in the conviction that robust data is essential to effective policy, Petr's research focuses on equitable access to high-quality early learning and child care, with particular attention to child care deserts and lower program quality in Toronto's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.



22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



GENERAL INQUIRIES



For further information about this event, please contact:

George Brown College, School of Early Childhood

T: 416.415.5000 ext. 2310

Email: ece@georgebrown.ca

Summer Institute **2026 Information**

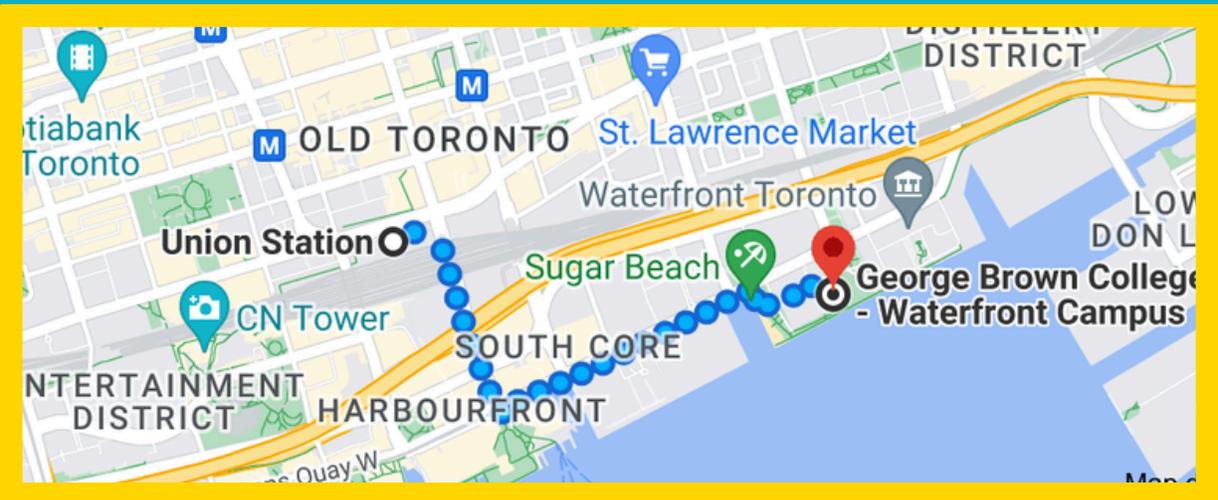
Hotels nearby:

- [Union Hotel](#)
- [Novotel Toronto Centre](#)
- [The Westin Harbour Castle](#)

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

GETTING THERE



From Union Station

- Walk (about 2 minutes) to 51 Dockside Drive
- Take the Number 6 bus (Queens Quay and Sherbourne) 5 stops to Dockside Drive at Queens Quay East (South Side)



22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

DAY AT A GLANCE morning

AM 8:30	REGISTRATION
AM 9:00	WELCOME AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
AM 9:15	KEYNOTE: WHEN EDUCATORS LEAD, SYSTEMS CHANGE Rita Mueller President, Northwest Territories Teachers' Association
AM 9:45	PANEL ONE: ADDRESSING BIAS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS Magdalena Janus, PhD Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia; Professor (part-time), Offord Centre for Child Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University Shannon Brown, B.A., Dipl. M.M., RECE Manager Children's Services, United Counties of Leeds and Grenville Nicola Lyle Chief Executive Officer, Peterborough Child & Family Centres
AM 10:40	BREAK
AM 10:55	PANEL TWO: LEADING INCLUSION FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE COMMUNITY Christine McLean, PhD Associate Professor and Chair, Child and Youth Study Department, Mount Saint Vincent University Shelly Mehta, RECE, OCT, PhD Professor and Program Coordinator, George Brown Polytechnic; Vice President, Canadian Association for Social Justice Education Amanda Pont-Shanks, RECE, BECE (Hons) Manager, Early Learning and Childcare Programs and Services, Métis Nation of Ontario Amelia Rupsys RECE, Ba.Sc., B.ed President, Early Childhood Resource Consultant Network of Ontario (ECRCNO)
PM 12:00	LUNCH

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



DAY AT A GLANCE afternoon

WORKSHOPS

#1: STRENGTHENING PRACTICE THROUGH POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Maria Troia, RECE

Coordinator, Training and Development (Bilingual), City of Toronto

Meghan Ardies, RECE

Coordinator, Training and Development, City of Toronto

#2: GENDER-EXPANSIVE AND TRANS-AFFIRMATIVE PEDAGOGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Shailja Jain, RECE, M.Ed., PhD Candidate

Professor and Coordinator, School of Early Childhood, George Brown Polytechnic

#3: IMMIGRATION, EQUITY, AND THE FUTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Yolande Pottie-Sherman, PhD

Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Memorial University, Newfoundland

#4: HONOURING INDIGENOUS APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Michal Perlman, PhD

Professor, Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, OISE, University of Toronto; Chair, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development

Gail Francis, M.Ed.

Indigenous Early Learning Child Care Coordinator, Mawiw Council Inc.

#5: BUILDING SEAMLESS EXPERIENCES: EDUCATOR LEADERSHIP IN THE WATERLOO MODEL

Melissa Hilton, RECE, BSW, M.Ed.

Extended Day Program Manager, Waterloo Region District School Board

#6: SEEING EARLY, ACTING EARLY: EDUCATORS AS LEADERS IN IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING DIVERSE NEEDS

Jane Bertrand

Program Director, Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation Inc.

PM
1:30

PM
2:45

BREAK

PM
3:00

KEYNOTE: REIMAGINING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

Janelle Brady, PhD

Assistant Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University

PM
3:30

ECE AWARD OF EXCELLENCE : DR. PETR VARMUZA

Presented by: Patricia Chorney Rubin, Director, School of Early Childhood and School of Behavioural Science, George Brown Polytechnic

followed by

CLOSING REMARKS

PM
4:00

RECEPTION

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



TRIBUTE



A Tribute to Dr. Jennifer Jenkins *Outgoing Chair, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development*

With deep gratitude and admiration, we honour Dr. Jennifer Jenkins as she concludes her outstanding tenure as chair of the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development.

Professor Jenkins received her PhD in psychology from the University of London's Institute of Child Health in 1987 and joined the University of Toronto as an assistant professor in 1991. An internationally recognized scholar and leader in the field of child development and mental health, Dr. Jenkins has made transformative contributions to the generation and dissemination of scientific knowledge. With a focus on the cognitive and social-emotional development of preschool and school-aged children, she has led rigorous longitudinal cohort studies examining the interplay between biological vulnerability and high-risk environments, consistently bridging research with policy and practice to advance real-world impact.

As chair of the Atkinson Centre, Dr. Jenkins has brought exceptional intellectual depth and integrity. During her tenure, the Centre strengthened its national and international profile, expanded cross-sector partnerships, and advanced its mission to mobilize evidence that informs policy and improves outcomes for children and families.

On behalf of the entire Atkinson Centre community, we extend our deepest gratitude to Dr. Jenkins for her extraordinary service and lasting legacy. We wish her every success in this next chapter and look forward to continued collaboration in the years ahead.

22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



WELCOME



Welcoming Our New Chair

Michal Perlman, PhD

Professor, Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, OISE, University of Toronto; Chair, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development

We are delighted to welcome Michal Perlman as the new chair of the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development. Dr. Perlman is a nationally respected developmental psychologist whose research focuses on early learning environments, educator practice, and children's social and emotional development. She holds a PhD in psychology and is a professor at the University of Toronto, where her work has made significant contributions to evidence-informed policy and practice in early childhood education across Canada. We are honoured to have Dr. Perlman join the Atkinson Centre in this important role and look forward to the insight and collaboration she brings to our work.



22ND ANNUAL

SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



REGISTRATION FORM

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SUBMIT THE FORM BELOW BY EMAIL.
PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY OR COMPLETE AS AN ADOBE FILLABLE FORM.

22ND ANNUAL SUMMER INSTITUTE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

POWER AND POTENTIAL

THE ECE WORKFORCE AS A FORCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

MAY 1, 2026

George Brown Polytechnic, Waterfront Campus
51 Dockside Drive, Toronto

REGISTRATION FEE: \$185

(Full Time Student Rate: \$90)

HST Registration Number: 108082868RTR001
Advance payment is required to register.

NAME: _____ TITLE: _____

ORGANIZATION: _____

PROVINCE: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

EMAIL (required): _____

WORKSHOP SELECTION (first choice): 1 2 3 4 5 6

WORKSHOP SELECTION (second choice): 1 2 3 4 5 6

PLEASE IDENTIFY ANY REQUIRED ACCOMMODATIONS.
EVERY ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE TO FULFILL YOUR REQUEST.

sign language interpreter captioned media

food allergies/food restrictions: _____

TOTAL REMITTANCE: \$ _____

Method of Payment: mastercard visa

If you are paying by credit card, we will call you for card details.

PLEASE EMAIL YOUR COMPLETED REGISTRATION FORM TO:

ece@georgebrown.ca