Amid Crisis, Toward Justice: The People's Early Childhood Coalition and Policy Resistance in New York City

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Abstract

Moments of crisis and instability frequently catalyze new forms of collective action. Against this backdrop, we describe the inception and evolution of the People's Early Childhood Coalition (PECNYC), a grassroots advocacy group in New York City (NYC). Through a collectively authored living history, we draw on three years of advocacy documents and coalition members' written reflections to explore how activism unfolds as a lived and collective practice. We use brown's (2017) emergent strategy retrospectively to organize this account around four interconnected practices: love, care, and learning; decentralizing power; adaptive, non-linear responses to change; and naming the society we want. Our narrative illustrates how sustained relationships, shared knowledge, and collaborative policy rewriting support grassroots resistance and alternative policy proposals. We propose an alternative for coalition building through decentralized power and adaptive action, and offer collective visions of a more just early childhood system.

Keywords: Advocacy, Coalition Building, Early Childhood Policy, Movements, Emergent Strategy

Introduction

On a Monday night, the screen filled with the usual squares: a teacher still in her classroom with half the lights off, a director calling from a parked car, two parents, a retired instructional coach, a professor. The question that night had grown urgent: how to keep private equity and corporate childcare chains from capturing New York City's early childhood contracts. People weighed in with what they knew about contracts,

ownership structures, the pace of expansion, and the pressure on smaller community-based programs. By the end of the hour, we had a plan.

The People's Early Childhood Coalition of New York City (PECNYC) is a grassroots, cross-role coalition that centers educators, families, and community-based providers as political actors. PECNYC has no formal leaders or hierarchy; all are welcome, and the people who show up shift over time. We grew out of organizing that began in New York City (NYC) in the fall of 2022 and took shape as a coalition in the spring of 2023. In this article, we share the living history of PECNYC's work and how it addresses macro- and micro-level issues affecting the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce, children, and families in NYC.

We operate organically, meaning our priorities, strategies, and actions respond to changing conditions rather than to a predetermined plan. We have never had a conversation about a social-political theory that guides our practice. However, upon reflection, we use brown's (2017) work lightly in this account, not as a framework that produced PECNYC, but as language that helped us recognize patterns in what the coalition had become. Four recurring principles of emergent strategy organize the living history that follows. The first is the love, care, teaching, and learning that characterize our interactions with one another. The second is the way that we have decentralized power structures through our non-hierarchical interactions with one another and by rewriting official policy. The third is the adaptive, non-linear way that we respond to change. The final element of emergent strategy that has developed in our work together is naming the society that we want to live in. We are working toward justice and liberation in meaningful ways and want to share our story in case it is useful or inspirational to other communities.

Locating PECNYC in a Documented Wave

PECNYC belongs to a wave of early childhood organizing that the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (CSCCE) has been documenting through its Early Childhood History, Organizing, Ethos, and Strategy (ECHOES) project. ECHOES situates present-day activism within a century-long arc. Their documentation ranges from the day nurseries and kindergarten reformers of the nineteenth century, through the Child Care Employee Project and the Worthy Wage Campaign of the 1970s to 2002, to the compensation fights of the present, and maintains a running record of contemporary actions (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, n.d.; Whitebook et al., 2024; Whitebook & Williams, 2022). Recent entries include the annual Day Without Child Care strikes coordinated with Community Change; the defense of the Pay Equity Fund by educators in Washington, D.C.; the Childcare Providers Association of Michigan's decision to conduct its own audit when the state audited the subsidy system; mutual aid and safe-transit networks formed by a Minneapolis, Minnesota program during immigration enforcement surges; and, in New York State, Providers Organized for Power's demand for permanent child care funding through progressive taxation. We consider our coalition part of this wave and are working in solidarity wimavth these collective efforts to shape broader policy and advocacy.

Positionality

In the spirit of emergent strategy, which understands change as relational, adaptive, and shaped through our everyday interactions and collective practices (brown, 2017), we name the people who have a part in the story. All of the authors of this paper participate in PECNYC. We are Maria Mavrides Calderon, a Latina former preschool teacher and director, and current teacher educator; and Lacey Peters, a white female teacher educator and early childhood researcher. Helen Frazier, a white pre-K teacher and mother; Diandra Vermayne, an instructional coordinator and teacher; Sheila Skzlanny, a Latin American

Early Childhood Dual Language Instructional Coordinator, teacher educator, and mother of a multilingual child in New York City's early childhood education system; and Alisa Algava, a white queer woman-ish educational leader-researcher-activist. Our positionality grounds our work alongside NYC teachers, young children, families, and communities. We share a commitment to educational equity, children's rights, and play-based, emancipatory approaches to early childhood education. Our work is particularly attentive to the experiences and rights of multilingual children and those with disabilities, whose identities, knowledge, communication, and ways of participating are often marginalized within dominant educational policies and practices. These commitments shape the questions we ask, the experiences we share, and the ways we interpret PECNYC's history and work.

As we tell our history, we will also name other members of our coalition whom we have learned from and admire. Their voices will also be shared in this narrative as several of them responded to survey prompts about being a part of PECNYC. To gather additional perspective, we wrote to members of the coalition and asked them to tell us how they came to PECNYC, what it had changed for them, and what they hoped it would become. Fifteen members wrote back. We use their words in our narrative with their permission and without names, except when a member explicitly asked to be named. We have also drawn on three years of our own meeting notes, drafts, letters, and text threads to offer further nuance to our history

New York City Context: Rapid Expansion and Changing Administrations

In 2014, NYC mayor Bill de Blasio expanded universal prekindergarten to all four-year-olds in NYC (Pre-K for All), a free, full-day program open to every four-year-old in the city. Sites were located either in public schools or in programs run by community-based organizations (CBOs), the nonprofit and neighborhood agencies that have long provided child care in New York, that contracted with the city. In 2017, de Blasio announced the launch of 3-K for All, the same program extended down to three-year-olds, including previous settings and adding home-based family childcare networks (New York City Department of Education Press Office, 2017). The city's ECCE program quickly grew to serve over 100,000 children ages 3 to 5 (Elsen-Rooney, 2025).

To support this massive expansion, the Department of Education created a robust central office with leadership teams in operations, policy, data, family engagement, pedagogy, assessment, enrollment, and special education. Additionally, the city recruited knowledgeable early childhood teachers, center directors, and special educators to build a public workforce of instructional coaches, social workers, emergent multilingual specialists, and family childcare support. Many PECNYC members were among them. This unionized workforce of early childhood support professionals grew to be over 400 strong. We visited classrooms and led professional learning communities that were increasingly local and responsive to the specific strengths and needs of NYC's diverse communities. Additionally, the city partnered with local colleges and universities to develop free, flexible, locally responsive curricula available in the eleven languages most commonly spoken in NYC (New York City Public Schools, n.d.).

As support professionals visited programs, they developed intimate awareness of the impact of structural problems in the design of NYC's public system. Critically, compensation and benefits differed between equally qualified teachers working in community-based organizations and those in public schools. These inequities destabilized community-based programs and programs for students with disabilities that often had deep roots in their communities and expertise at providing care to young children (Mavrides Calderon & Kohn, 2026). There were even deeper inequalities between 3K and pre-K teachers and home-based childcare providers (Reid et al., 2019)

In 2020, the coronavirus disrupted the development of the nascent system. Without programs to visit, many instructional coordinators were temporarily reassigned to remote teaching vacancies. Simultaneously, the Movement for Black Lives, catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd, was followed by the creation of a racial equity team within the early childhood division, which drew more formal attention to the inequitable compensation between community-based providers and members of the teachers' union.

Eric Adams became mayor in January 2022, toward the end of the quarantine, when early childhood support staff expected to resume their roles supporting programs. However, rather than stabilizing and rebuilding, the Adams administration-initiated restructuring by weakening the leadership teams within the central office and eliminating the roles of over 400 instructional coaches and social workers (Amin, 2022). Further, the Adams administration replaced city-developed curricula with Teaching Strategies' The Creative Curriculum and its GOLD assessment system, which the company calls a comprehensive early childhood "ecosystem," used across the globe and owned by the private-equity firm KKR (Frazier, 2023). In addition to being a curriculum and assessment tool, the Teaching Strategies system offered a 'professional development system with personalized learning journeys,' on-demand e-learning courses, exclusive access to 'experts' and live, virtual professional development sessions.

Without a central office fully staffed with early childhood operations specialists, payments to programs were delayed. Program leaders began taking out personal loans and credit lines to cover payroll and keep their communities afloat (Elsen-Rooney, 2022; Pineda, 2023). Sheltering Arms, a large social services provider that operated six programs throughout NYC, was forced to close (Bamberger, 2022). The city's 70-person early childhood outreach team, which included a call operation staffed by 50 full-time, permanent employees, was subsequently reduced and dispersed across different departments and managers. This weakened the coordinated outreach and enrollment infrastructure that had helped families connect with programs (Wallack, 2023). Later, in reading about how governments manage crises, we found a name for what we had lived through: crisis as a form of governance (Elfert & Balakrishnan, 2025). Instability itself had become a way of governing, and its risks had been pushed downward onto the people least able to carry them: teachers, families, and the community-based programs that had held these neighborhoods together for decades.

The Origins of People's Early Childhood Coalition of NYC

In the fall of 2022, veteran organizers began meeting each day at noon with hundreds of the eliminated, reassigned, and concerned early childhood support staff. They are members of a progressive caucus within the teachers' union, and helped the early childhood support staff leverage union support to keep their jobs. They held town halls, attended city council hearings, attracted media coverage, rallied and gathered letters of support from community members, site leaders and educators. Astonishingly, they successfully appealed to the union to hold a vote of no-confidence in the mayor's early childhood deputy chancellor. In January 2023, over 400 early childhood support staff received notice stating their jobs were secure for the remainder of the 2022-2023 school year. Their contracts were extended again, and remain in place today (Mapes, 2023). It was out of this success that PECNYC was formed.

One of the people who called those first meetings wrote,

> I helped start it because the conditions made it unavoidable. The moment that pushed me from frustration into building a coalition was watching educators and families get talked at—not listened to—while policy decisions were being made that directly reshaped classrooms, staffing, and services. DOE's (Department of Education) approach felt

> consistently top-down: new initiatives rolling out with polished language, while classrooms and communities absorbed the chaos. PECNYC was born from a very simple conviction: if we didn't build our own organized power across roles, the system would keep doing things to us instead of with us.

Another PECNYC member who attended these initial meetings described how that time felt,

> It was a painful year and joining these meetings kept me from feeling helpless and powerless. The founders created such a safe, open space and were able to mobilize people into action without it feeling pressured or overwhelming. I want to be a part of their movement.

Viewed retrospectively through emergent strategy, the coalition's formation illustrates how people can respond adaptively to changing conditions by drawing on existing connections, learning from one another, and transforming isolation into collective power (brown, 2017).

Critical to the organization's success were the instructional coaches, social workers, leaders, and educators who helped found NYC's public ECCE system and are deeply passionate, veteran practitioners. They had strong relationships with the communities they supported, and could see that "people were exhausted, under-resourced, and often blamed for conditions they didn't create" (Martha[1]). Initial members of PECNYC included leaders in the racial equity core team, who had recently engaged deeply in planning more just systems. When the restructuring came, they used their accumulated knowledge and trusted relationships to organize.

Consequently, PECNYC members understood the immediate restructuring as part of a broader struggle over whose labor is valued, whose knowledge counts, and who has the authority to shape ECCE policy. Louisa, a member, described "the struggle of early childhood workers as intricately bound up in the struggle of workers in general." Elana explained, "We see PEC as part of a broader movement to treat early childhood education as essential infrastructure, not a low-wage sector expected to run on goodwill."

Love, Care and Learning

Fundamental to PECNYC members' sustained participation, knowledge sharing, learning, and collective action are love and care, a core of brown's (2017) emergent strategy. Madeline, a newer member, wrote:

> I also want to name how welcomed I feel: the expertise in the group is real, and the culture is respectful. The coalition makes it possible to learn, contribute, and stay engaged even when the realities of the work sometimes limit how present I can be.

PECNYC meets once a week on Zoom, and its members stay in touch via a text group. Our Zoom meetings are a warm space, where children born during our time together are called "the people's babies" and teachers can ask for comfort after a tough day.

Our impact is real because the pace of our interactions is "always slow and inclusive." (Lisa) People outside of PECNYC, who share our concerns, are invited to join our coalition by their professors, coaches, or friends. Jane, a teacher, explains, "My

[1] Names used to identify coalition members in citations are pseudonyms.

instructional coach invited me to a group because I felt so lonely in my needs. I thought I was alone in my problems." Coleen, a director shares,

> Now when I see how [community-based programs] are struggling to retain teachers, I see how it is part of a much larger system. When teachers and leaders voice their concerns about this, I encourage them to join in the work toward equity, in both our group and outside. A few of my program leaders have joined.

The work has shifted members' sense of themselves, what they can refuse and what they can change. Members learn to question official metrics and institutional data that, as Julia, a member, wrote, "function as systems of legitimized marginalization, obscuring lived experience rather than illuminating" the challenges programs face. Diana, an instructional coach, described the group's impact on them through their reflection. They wrote,

> how empowering it has been for me to be part of this, and how much I have learned that carries over to other situations, professional and personal, in calmly and unapologetically advocating for myself, the teachers and programs I support at work, and my family and friends in my personal life.

Decentralizing Power Structures

PECNYC decentralizes power by treating knowledge as distributed across roles and by creating multiple pathways for members to shape strategy, public narratives, and policy. For many of its members, PECNYC is a unique group in that we interact with one another in a non-hierarchical way. It is a place where educators' experiences are not treated as "anecdotes," but as legitimate policy knowledge. Rita explains,

> I learned that early childhood is a system where people are often kept intentionally separate—teachers from parents, school-based from community-based, practitioners from policy folks. PECNYC disrupted that separation. I learned from parents how policy harms show up as daily indignities: enrollment barriers, lost services, confusing messaging, constant uncertainty. I learned from community-based leaders how funding and contracting structures create instability. I learned from researchers how to translate stories into evidence. The biggest lesson: our differences are not the problem, our isolation is.

PECNYC's critique of the mandated curriculum illustrates how cross-role participation produced a fuller understanding of policy. Teachers described constraints on professional judgment, directors identified inequities created by shifting directives, instructional coaches explained how implementation expectations affected their work with programs, researchers connected these experiences to broader patterns of standardization, and parents made visible the confusion and loss of responsiveness experienced by families. These perspectives demonstrated that this issue was directly affecting teacher autonomy, relationships, transparency, and children's learning. Consistent with emergent strategy, no single role held the complete picture; understanding emerged through relationships across roles.

Feeling Empowered

PECNYC creates an alternative path to leadership for its members, developing our confidence in engaging public officials. Carly, a teacher member shares,

> It changed my identity from "someone impacted by policy" to a policy actor. I stopped seeing policymaking as something that only happens in offices and hearings. Policy is also what happens in implementation—what gets funded, what gets enforced, what gets ignored, and who gets invited to speak. PECNYC helped me claim that space with less apology: I'm not just a classroom practitioner; I'm a decision-maker in the sense that I help shape what becomes politically possible and publicly undeniable.

Sometimes PECNYC members have disrupted power structures by being out of compliance with their expected roles. For example, PECNYC members collaborated with an early childhood directors' group to respond to the injustice of delayed payments to childcare programs. They collected data from programs about how much they were owed and made a one-pager to share with stakeholders. When Head Start auditors visited NYC's programs, members quietly handed them data revealing the conditions under which the programs were operating.

Furthermore, PECNYC often operates like a distributed writing room. When the DOE releases policy guidance, we often send them edits. When we draft, we ask: What language will be accurate enough for policymakers, clear enough for families, and safe enough for members facing institutional risk? Coalition writing often involves discussing audience, attribution, evidence, tone, and consequences. At times, the group weighs whether a claim should be issued collectively, signed individually, held for a private meeting, or circulated publicly. Rewriting policy has become a regular group practice. For example, in discussions of fidelity tools, documents showed how leaders positioned those tools as "non-evaluative," which was counteracted by PECNYC's consensus that, on the ground, they were perceived as surveillance mechanisms. In this way, PECNYC rewrites the policy's public story by producing an alternative narrative grounded in lived experience.

Different members of PECNYC carry different levels of personal risk. For example, employees of the DOE face consequences for speaking to the press, so this work is often done by faculty, retirees, or community-based educators. Navigating proximity to power remains complex. PECNYC does not resolve the contradictions of being inside a system while resisting its harms, but it helps make those contradictions visible and shared rather than individualized. We balance strategic caution with radical commitments, and each of us makes deliberate choices about when to speak publicly and when to work more quietly.

Alice described the recurring debate this way:

> One recurring tension is between people who want to stay "at the table" with DOE and people who feel that the table itself is part of the problem. We have real debates about strategy—collaboration versus confrontation, incremental wins versus public escalation. We don't always agree, and compromises happen. What works best is a shared decision norm: we don't sacrifice the lived reality of classrooms and families for access or aesthetics. When we have multiple viewpoints, we try to anchor decisions in: (a) who is most impacted, (b) what builds durable power, and (c) what can shift public narrative, not just what is easiest to negotiate.

Adaptive, Non-Linear Response to Change

Our agenda has evolved in response to immediate concerns on the ground. As the coalition strengthened, the agenda widened from mandated curriculum and

commercialization pressures to Pre-K special education supports, and then turned to governance tools, such as fidelity checklists — forms asking leaders to verify that classrooms are following a curriculum exactly as written. As we developed strong relationships with the press, DOE leadership began to anticipate our concerns and offer PECNYC monthly meetings to share our feedback and demands. Two PECNYC members were also appointed to key leadership positions within the central office.

PECNYC members plan public events and serve as a resource to the press covering NYC's early childhood initiative. For example, PECNYC held a Creative Curriculum town hall described as "a pretty wild example of democratic conversation… there was a lot of passion and urgency—people really wanted their voices to be heard!" (Monica). Additionally, a petition to reconsider the mandated curriculum was circulated and collected more than 1,000 signatures. These events demonstrated that PECNYC's demands reflected widespread concerns rather than isolated grievances.

A PECNYC member, describes,

> There are times when people have different ideas about whether to prioritize immediate program needs (like compensation and staffing stability) versus broader long-term policy campaigns. PECNYC takes those differences seriously and works toward alignment rather than pretending everyone is in the same place. Even when there's uncertainty, the group tends to move with a "what can we do next?" mindset—grounded, practical, and focused on impact. (John)

They go on to say PECNYC "is not a site of complaint, it's a site of action. People are well connected, informed, and strategic, and that matters because directors and teachers do not have time to waste."

Through weekly meetings and daily contact in a text chain, PECNYC members are able to efficiently identify and elevate policy concerns. A PECNYC teacher, Myra, explains,

> PECNYC helped me connect the daily frustration of being pushed toward inflexible curriculum directly to system decisions about standardization and control. It also helped me connect the struggle to secure appropriate supports for Pre-K students with disabilities to funding priorities, staffing models, and fragmented service systems. The concrete example is that my classroom concerns became coalition demands—and those demands reached officials in ways I could not have achieved alone."

Naming the Society We Want

PECNYC reimagines an early childhood system through shared authority, care, equity, and responsiveness, and translates those commitments into public proposals. As we have grown together, our interactions with one another have given us a feeling for the kind of society we want to build for families and children. In 2025, in anticipation of the Mamdani administration, we developed a blueprint describing the next steps in how to build a more equitable and responsive early care and education system (PECNYC, 2026). Our blueprint was informed by international examples, especially by the established early care and education systems in Sweden and New Zealand. We hoped it would give the incoming administration a practical roadmap for lasting reform. We met with political leaders to share our blueprint and suggested individuals who could help make it a reality.

We have also expanded our work through building coalitions with allied groups, including representatives for family childcare providers and public education advocates.

We have connected with organizations that work for economic justice such as the Private Equity Stakeholder Project and Americans for Financial Reform. These connections have helped us to see our very specific, locally responsive efforts in a broader context.

What Changed and What Did Not

Because emergent strategy resists simple, linear accounts of change, we believe these outcomes are not the product only of PECNYC's actions. We understand them as shifts to which PECNYC contributed through cultivated relationships, collective interpretation, repeated interventions, and work alongside other organizers and institutional actors.

The ECCE system in NYC today includes unionized instructional coaches and social workers, as well as inclusion specialists who help educators respond to the needs of children with disabilities. The leadership teams, including those supporting emergent multilingual learners, are being rebuilt in the central office. There are expanded options for children with disabilities. There is no longer a single, mandated curriculum, but a process to select from eight approved curricula (Elsen-Rooney, 2026) including the free, flexible units of study that were developed in NYC with the mayoral administration that expanded PreK. Teachers are allowed to select the books that they would like to read to their classes. We believe that PECNYC has had a role in each of these shifts.

There remains stark inequity in the compensation of family childcare providers, community-based teachers, and unionized educators. This is the primary injustice in our system. The strain on community-based programs to attract and retain staff is constant, leading to disrupted early attachments for so many young children.

The impact of investor-backed chains on our young system is also a focus for PECNYC. We wrote an open letter to Mayor Mamdani, and gathered signatures from allied leaders and organizations, asking the administration not to contract with investor-backed chains. They replied without a commitment to change. We are working with allied economists and policy experts to analyze the changes in market share for private-equity-owned programs.

Where We Sit

Three years in, none of this looks like a campaign with a beginning and an end. It looks like what brown (2017) describes: small, repeated, relational work that changes what is possible without ever quite announcing itself. We are one group among many. We are a part of the wave of activism described by the ECHOES project (Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, n.d.). We differ from much of it in one respect: PECNYC was built across roles rather than within one, which makes it slower and, we think, harder to dismantle. As brown (2017) writes, "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system" (p. 53). We offer this history because it is useful.

We do not claim that PECNYC represents all ECCE advocacy. However, it offers a collectively authored history of how one grassroots coalition endured, and acted within a particular policy context. Our narrative shows that the four emergent strategy principles we evoke are mutually reinforcing rather than sequential. Care sustains participation; distributed participation produces broader knowledge and power; that knowledge supports adaptive action; and repeated action expands the coalition's capacity to imagine and pursue a more just ECCE system. Emergent strategy therefore helps us interpret PECNYC's influence as an accumulation of relational practices that changes what members and institutions understand to be possible.

Although situated in New York City, our story speaks to a broader urgency across ECCE systems to create grassroots spaces for activism and policymaking (Whitebook & Williams, 2022). This urgency increases when ambiguous conceptions of "quality" are implemented through standardized, datafied measures that constrain teacher autonomy, children's agency, and family privacy. Such measures may also obscure how multilingual children and children with disabilities communicate, participate, and learn. Under opaque or punitive governance conditions, PECNYC offers one possible model of family- and practitioner-led advocacy.

Lessons Learned

PECNYC's history suggests that advocacy often intensifies during a crisis of legitimacy affecting children, families, and educators. Members experienced policy change not simply as new rules, but as a governance style that produced exclusion, uncertainty, and vulnerability. Regaining collective agency was therefore central to organizing. Early coalition building should begin with system visibility: tracking mandates, documenting directives, identifying contracts and enforcement mechanisms, and reconstructing how decisions are made. We believe this is a form of emergent sensemaking that allowed PECNYC strategized campaigns and next steps.

Coalition building also accelerated when members framed problems as features of system design rather than as failures of individual teachers, families, or programs. This reframing created a shared critique across roles and made collective action possible. From the emergent strategy perspective, differently positioned members contribute distinct forms of knowledge, making difference a source of collective intelligence rather than an obstacle to agreement. Including people with diverse expertise and varying levels of availability can disrupt the institutional separation among teachers, parents, program leaders, researchers, and policy actors. This cross-role structure can rebuild trust, accountability, and safety among groups divided by hierarchy.

Much of PECNYC's influence occurred through policy "textwork": collaboratively drafting and revising letters, testimony, petitions, public statements, and alternative policy language. Through this rewriting, collective interpretation became concrete and portable across meetings, hearings, media coverage, and public events. This suggests a realistic theory of change for ECCE coalitions in large systems. Influence may occur not only through policy reversal, but through negotiating implementation: what is required, how mandates are explained, what is monitored, and whose knowledge is treated as authoritative. Consistent with brown's (2017) fractal understanding of change, we believe these small interventions have the potential to gradually alter broader institutional expectations and expand what becomes politically possible.

A Note on Resistance

PECNYC's relational infrastructure makes participation possible across different levels of institutional exposure. Group messaging allows rapid information sharing and comparatively low-visibility participation, while Zoom supports sustained discussion without requiring travel or public presence. These tools help distribute advocacy labor and provide multiple ways to contribute. We found that resistance is also generative: we aim to challenge harmful policies while producing counter-narratives, alternative policy texts, and relationships that sustain action.

Grassroots resistance nevertheless remains structurally vulnerable. Participation is shaped by time, employment conditions, caregiving responsibilities, and access to social capital (Brady et al., 1995; Casalaspi, 2022). Sustained engagement can also produce burnout and emotional exhaustion (Peña et al., 2023). PECNYC's flexible participation, distributed leadership, and culture of care may mitigate these pressures, but they do not

make the coalition immune to them. We know that care is essential. We also suggest that emergent strategy should not be used to romanticize, assume adaptability, or suggest that relationships can substitute for material resources and institutional protections.

Conclusion

PECNYC represents one among many forms of ECCE activism. In systems marked by unequal authority, expertise, and exposure to risk, its model offers an equity-oriented way to move policy through shared interpretation, distributed action, and sustained relationships. Its work echoes broader mobilizations (Gunn, 2025), while showing how a local coalition can resist harmful policies and practice more democratic and humane forms of governance. As brown (2017) reminds us, "ours is one effort in the midst of many, and the multitude is where our power lies" (p. 91).

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