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AECEO Partners with the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in Ontario. We support ECEs in their professional practice and advocate for recognition and appropriate compensation for early childhood professionals, so they can provide high-quality programs for children and families. One of our ongoing goals is to activate Ontario’s ECEs to engage in leadership and advocacy, challenging practices and policies that restrict expression and pedagogical potential for ECEs, children and families. In their intellectual and ethical practices with children, families and communities, we believe ECEs are uniquely positioned to imagine and create the world we want to live in. We are thus pleased to announce our partnership with Western University as co-leads for the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care and Secretariat. Through this partnership, the AECEO seeks to make public the work and value of ECEs while supporting their pedagogical journey. This not only benefits children, families and societies but also advances the early childhood profession.

Farewell to Executive Coordinator Rachel Lafferty

The Board of Directors would like thank Rachel Lafferty for taking on the role of Executive Coordinator for the past 8 months. We are grateful to Rachel for building on the positive relationships we have with those in the ECEC community as well as forging new relationships – particularly with allies in northern Ontario. Rachel has also helped illuminate the values of the AECEO, reminding us that effective community-based work is truly collaborative. We are delighted that our previous interim Coordinator, Alana Powell, will take on a part-time leadership role in the organization. Alana will provide mentorship and guidance to our team as we consider next steps. Since departing in January, Alana has moved to Ottawa and welcomed a baby girl, Vera, to her family. We are excited to have her (and Vera!) back as we continue with the important work of building the collective voice of Early Childhood Educators in Ontario!

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Association, the volunteer Communities of Practice across the province, the Board of Directors, and the provincial office staff and interns who work so hard to advocate for the Early Childhood Educators of Ontario. The Association’s Professional Pay and Decent Work campaign advances the collective voice of Early Childhood professionals in collaboration with numerous stakeholders and organizations. It has been my pleasure to work with all of you and I wish the Association all the best both now and in the future.”

Rachel Lafferty, MEd, BEd, BSc, RECE, OCT

In Memorium
Janice Rose Hughes
November 8, 1933 – September 6, 2019

Our condolences go out to the family of Janice Hughes. Janice was a stalwart member of the AECEO all of her professional life - long after retirement she continued to be a member and donor in support of the AECEO and her fellow ECEs. Her steadfast support and regard for the AECEO warmed our hearts. She will be remembered with great esteem and appreciation.

Obituary from Humphrey Funeral Home
Janice died peacefully surrounded by her loving family. She was the daughter of Lawrence Wright Jackson and Jocelyn Wilson Maud Brennan, and the loving and beloved wife of the late John Noel Hughes. Devoted mother of Peter Lawrence (Julie) and Sarah Noel (Douglas), and proud Grammy of Marley and Jonathan. Sister of the late Esther Ann.

Janice took great joy being an early childhood educator, was a member of the AECEO, and prior to that a member of the Junior League. She was a golfer, an avid fan of figure skating and tennis, enjoyed playing bridge and cherished her time at Grace Church on-the-Hill, The Badminton & Racquet Club of Toronto and The Toronto Hunt.
AECEO NEWS: AECEO PARTNERS WITH THE PROVINCIAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR EARLY YEARS AND CHILD CARE / FAREWELL TO EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR RACHEL LAFFERTY / IN MEMORIUM  4

LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD  6

PROFESSIONAL PAY & DECENT WORK PROJECT: ONTARIO EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR DECENT WORK CHARTER – ENDORSEMENT REQUEST  7

NO MORE BABY STEPS: POLITICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE 2018 ELECTION FOR MOVING CHILDCARE POLICY FORWARD IN ONTARIO  9

THE PEER REVIEWED COLLECTION  18

FROM THE EDITOR  18

HIDDEN MESSAGES: BARRIERS TOWARD PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION  19

THE (NOT) GOOD EDUCATOR: RECONCEPTUALIZING THE IMAGE OF THE EDUCATOR  40

AD INDEX

ECE QUALIFICATIONS UPGRADE PROGRAM Inside Front Cover

JOHNSON INSURANCE Inside Back Cover

SCHOOL SPECIALTY Outside Back Cover

The AECEO would like to acknowledge & thank the following contributors:

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Brooke Richardson (photo credit)

ABOVE PHOTO
Walk for Childcare organized by Thunder Bay ECE Unite: AECEO Decent Work Community of Practice

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kim nelson design
Looking Back, Moving Forward

In April 2019, I had the opportunity to attend the Early Childhood Educator’s of British Columbia annual conference titled *Looking back, moving forward*. This conference brought together early childhood educators, researchers, politicians, policy-makers and sector leaders from across British Columbia and Canada. The turnout was inspiring as over 700 delegates packed into the crowded downtown Vancouver ballroom. I had the opportunity to meet and speak with educators excited to engage in this professional development opportunity through attending and participating in workshops that explored topics from innovative pedagogy to building leadership capacity to developing approaches for working with government. I was particularly inspired by the keynote address of Dr. Cindy Blackstock who, during this trying political time, passionately reminded us that all “kids are worth the money”. Dr. Blackstock encouraged delegates to “bear witness” to the ongoing discrimination against Indigenous children and families – something that the AECEO is working hard to address through our Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation.

It was also very interesting to learn about recent policy approaches of our international allies. Keynotes speaker Tove Mogstad Slinde, a senior adviser in the Norwegian Ministry of Education, shared insights from her country’s notable successes in increasing access to kindergarten and childcare programs since 2000. Relevant to our work at the AECEO, Slinde spoke about the decent wages of pedagogues (the Norwegian equivalent of early childhood educators). She noted that municipalities (rather than the state) play a key role in negotiating these wages with the unions representing pedagogues. A key difference between Ontario (and Canada more broadly) and Norway is that upwards of 95% of pedagogues in Norway are unionized. Through unionization pedagogues have built a strong collective voice affording them significant negotiating power in determining their wages across the sector. Slinde described a de facto wage scale (accepted across various models of provision) that ensured wages were commensurate with education. Most interesting was that, despite increasing amounts of private provision in Norway, the decent wages of pedagogues appeared to be a non-negotiable component of the system. This is an important insight as we continue to build our own collective voice asserting decent wages and working conditions for ECEs in all settings in Ontario!

Overall, I was inspired to witness the successes of the ECEBC. The organization clearly has a great deal of momentum and energy as the BC provincial government continues to make clear, progressive gains with childcare. It is possible for provincial professional associations to influence big steps, even leaps, towards actualizing a comprehensive childcare system.

AECEO President Brooke Richardson, M.A., Ph.D., RECE
Professional Pay & Decent Work Project
Ontario Early Childhood Sector Decent Work
Charter – Endorsement Request

The Professional Pay and Decent Work project promotes a vision of Ontario that supports universal access to quality and affordable early years and child care programs for all children and families; professional pay and decent work for registered early childhood educators (RECEs) and child care staff is foundational to this vision.

In the Spring of 2017, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) convened a Decent Work Task Force to develop the Ontario Early Childhood Sector Decent Work Charter and Workforce Strategy Recommendations. The Decent Work Task Force is part of the AECEO’s Decent Work Project funded by the Atkinson Foundation since 2015. Project partners include the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) and Institute for Change Leaders (ICL).

Through wide collaboration and extensive community consultation, the Ontario Early Childhood Sector Decent Work Charter and supporting document, Making Decent Work outline core principles of well-being, fairness, professional growth, and commensurate pay. Endorsement of the Charter signifies an organization’s commitment to the tenets of decent work while offering a voice of leadership to persuade governments to commit to long-term, stable funding increases that would provide fair wages for educators, affordable fees for parents and quality child care for children.

Endorsing the Ontario Early Childhood Decent Work Charter does not ask an organization to commit to wage increases in the absence of fiscal ability or government supports. In the current system, this would mean raising already sky-high parent fees; which, we know is untenable. We understand that government inaction and lack of public funding are inhibiting our collective progress. We will continue to advocate for public funding to support organizations in providing professional pay and decent work to their staff and invite you and your organization to work with and support this effort.

Please add your organization’s name to the list of signatories and join us in building a stronger, more resilient and socially just early years and child care sector through the pursuit of decent work!

Charter: https://www.aeceo.ca/ontario_early_childhood_sector_decent_work_charter
**Decent Work Charter FAQs**

**Q. How can I endorse The Charter when I do not have the resources to implement?**

A. Many aspects of the Charter will not require financial resources, other areas will require new or adapted policies. The Task Force is developing as many resources to support organizations as possible. We will also work with large multi-service organizations to share human resource strategies.

**Q. I am a unionized employer, how will endorsing the Charter affect bargaining?**

A. We recommend that centres/employers work with the union to adapt and implement policies where appropriate. The Charter represents principles and values that we believe most organizations, particularly unionized settings already put into practice or aspire to.

**Q. What resources are available to implement the Charter?**

A. As mentioned above, the Task Force is working to develop the necessary resources to support the sector in reaching the goals of decent work.

**Q. How will the early years and child care sector be impacted by a PC Majority government? Will the Charter be relevant?**

A. The Task Force understands that many organizations and educators in the sector are worried about cuts to funding. The Task Force will continue to advocate for the early childhood workforce. We will continue to develop the necessary tools and resources to support the actualization of the Charter.

**Q. What role will the government play in assisting organizations to support the Charter?**

A. The AECEO’s Decent Work Task Force will continue to advocate for policies, resources and funding to support organizations and the broader early years and child care sector. In 2018, the Ministry of Education published a workforce strategy\(^1\) that, if implemented will address several of the Charter target areas. We believe that endorsing the Charter will help us to leverage broad support for more investments in the early years and child care sector.

**Q. Is it true that the AECEO is advising RECEs not to accept a position that pays less than $25.00 per hour?**

A. We recognize that many quality, not-for-profit organizations are not able to pay educators $25.00 per hour, although they value the work of their staff and utilize the $2.00 per hour Provincial Wage Enhancement/Home Child Care Enhancement Grant. We recognize that there is a great need for qualified educators in community based programs as many often choose to be employed in Full-Day Kindergartens where salaries can be higher. We believe that the government’s proposed wage grid as referenced in the workforce strategy will help to address the issue of compensation. We will be advocating for the government to provide financial support to implement a fair wage grid. For these reasons we are not instructing RECEs to not accept positions that pay less than $25.00 per hour. The AECEO and Task Force believe in equipping RECEs and staff with the information and support that they need to find meaningful employment within the early years and child care sector.

We hope that organizations will work with the AECEO’s Task Force to advocate for a fair wage grid. By endorsing the Charter, you are signalling to the sector and the government that you believe in the need to improve the wages and working conditions of the early childhood workforce. In fact, you are signalling that you believe in the role of well-compensated educators in contributing to quality experiences for children and their families.

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The 2018 Ontario election was a pivotal moment for childcare policy. In the pre-election budget, the sitting Liberal government unveiled an ambitious universal childcare strategy (Ontario Government, 2018). In the spring electoral campaign, two political parties (the Liberals and NDP) committed to building an accessible and affordable childcare system. The Liberal Party's detailed, costed, and multi-year childcare strategy represented the closest Ontario would have come to building and delivering a publicly managed and supported childcare system. Yet childcare was, in this case, and in every single election since 1993, an electoral loser.

Our research team is moving into the final year of a Social Science, Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project aimed at researching the ways in which care, and care work are understood and operationalized in social policy and practice, particularly in relation to early childhood education and care (ECEC). We realized that we had an opportunity to capture and preserve the confluence of advocacy, consultation, and adjacent policy work that had led up to childcare platforms in the 2018 election. We interviewed politicians, policy advisors, advocates, and academics across all parties and the ECEC sector about the election childcare platforms. We were interested in taking stock of the proposed childcare strategies. What were the strengths, problems, limitations, or fears associated with them? Importantly, we wanted to capture how politicians, policy makers, and advocates might hit the ground running to both talk about and build a high-quality childcare system when political conditions change. Our intention with this research study—, which is ongoing—is to create an institutional memoire for policy makers, advocates, and researchers that can assist Ontario specifically as well as other jurisdictions.

**Method**

An earlier study in our SSHRC project analyzed discursive constructions of the care and the care work in publicly available 2018 Ontario election childcare platforms and advocates' responses to them (Powell, Langford, Bezanson, Prentice, & Albanese, in press). In this study, we conducted, for the most part, fully on-the-record interviews about these earlier findings with two groups of informants: (a) politicians and policy advisors who were involved in developing and communicating childcare platforms during the 2018 Ontario spring election; and (b) childcare advocates who responded to the party platforms through various communications. As of the end of August 2018, we have conducted interviews with 14 politicians, policy advisors, advocates, and academics across all parties and the ECEC sector about the election childcare platforms. We were interested in taking stock of the proposed childcare strategies. What were the strengths, problems, limitations, or fears associated with them? Importantly, we wanted to capture how politicians, policy makers, and advocates might hit the ground running to both talk about and build a high-quality childcare system when political conditions change. Our intention with this research study—, which is ongoing—is to create an institutional memoire for policy makers, advocates, and researchers that can assist Ontario specifically as well as other jurisdictions.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Participants in the study</th>
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We are continuing to recruit participants but have had considerable difficulty getting Conservative politicians, academics, and advocates to go on the record. The interviews were approximately one hour in length and conducted by an investigator and a research assistant. Collectively, we reflected on transcribed data and identified emerging themes, issues, and anomalies. In this article, we report on some preliminary findings.
Table 1

<table>
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<th>POLITICIANS</th>
<th>POLICY ADVISORS</th>
<th>ADVOCATES AND OTHERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Kathleen Wynne (former Premier of Ontario)</td>
<td>Monica Lysack, Professor of Early Childhood Education and senior policy advisor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior Policy Advisor (anonymized per request)</td>
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<td>Andrew Bevin, Principal Secretary to Premier</td>
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<td>Karen Pitre, Lawyer and Engineer and Community Hubs Director, Office of the Premier</td>
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<td>Conservative</td>
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<td>Senior Policy Advisor (anonymized per request)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>Catherine Fife, NDP MPP, Critic Early Years and Child Care 2014–18</td>
<td>Gordon Cleveland, senior academic and author of Ontario childcare strategy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doly Begum, NDP MPP, Critic Early Years and Child Care 2018–present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lyndsay MacDonald, Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocates</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carolyn Ferns, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC)</td>
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<td>Laurel Rothman, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC)</td>
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<td>Bernice Cipparrone, Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Martha Friendly, Child Care Resource and Research Unit (CRRU)</td>
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Findings

Well before the 2018 election, the policy design of childcare in Ontario included some well-documented processes: building a JK/SK system at the elementary level, committing to adding a significant number of spaces for 0–5-year-olds, working with managers such as municipalities in relation to fees, and consulting with advocacy organizations on an ECEC workforce strategy. Policy design also included some deeply intersecting policy processes that set out to tackle gender inequalities, pay inequalities, and poverty reduction, areas in which childcare access and remuneration for workers proved important, as did finding, securing, and using existing locations (i.e., schools) to build a childcare system. The 2018 pre-election budget proposed an ambitious and unprecedented policy expansion in childcare, promising free preschool aged care in the province. The election campaign, in which childcare featured prominently, quickly ensued. In the next sections, we examine our research participants’ reflections on the 2018 election childcare platforms.
The Importance of a Childcare Platform

Informants who were politicians or policy advisors/makers during the 2018 Ontario spring election viewed childcare platforms as inelegant articulations of policy strategies, in part because as several noted “Nobody (in the electorate) reads them.” For Liberal informants, childcare policy actions taken prior to the spring election (i.e., free preschool in the 2018 budget announcement) were considered much more significant. Most informants also indicated that their childcare platforms were produced to pitch a simple key message—“a tax credit” (Conservative), “$15.00 a day” (NDP), and “free preschool” (Liberal)—that answered, as one informant stated, two questions, “What are you going to do?” and “How are you going to do it?”

In arriving at these “simple” messages, the Conservative informant indicated that Patrick Brown, the Conservative leader prior to Doug Ford, had developed a tax credit approach that was fully adopted during the election campaign. While the NDP consulted with a variety of stakeholders prior to the election, in the end, the party embraced three ideas for a universal childcare system (low fees or no fees for parents; decent work and pay for educators; and an expansion of public and non-profit services) articulated by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC). The Liberal government used academic Gordon Cleveland’s (2018) detailed report, which featured in the 2018 budget, to build on past childcare initiatives and launch an election campaign based on a free preschool plan. While supporting free preschool, informants from advocacy organizations questioned why the Liberal government had not implemented and institutionalized this plan earlier in their mandate. Taken together, these findings suggest that leaving significant childcare policy to the end of a four-year (or longer) term and policy implementation to the vicissitudes of election outcomes cements childcare’s precarity in the policy landscape. From a policy and design perspective, childcare budgeting and building require a great deal of planning and coordination, making them deeply vulnerable to other “more pressing” political considerations and general electoral ambivalence.

Informants reported that polling in Ontario showed reasonably high levels of cross-class and party support for the Budget 2018 childcare approach, and the election result was likely not a result of policy aversion. Even the Conservative informant, a policy advisor to Doug Ford during the election stated, “Universal childcare sounds great and a good thing for families, but there’s a sub-

[W]hile responding to the current Conservative government’s tax credits as negative childcare policy is necessary, it is also important to prepare for the next election.
stantial cost associated with it.” This finding points to the need for current opposition parties and advocates to cost out their childcare plans prior to the next election, particularly in relation to the often-comparable costs of a tax-credit approach. It also speaks to translating the complexities of building a childcare system and explaining tax policy in terms that can be easily understood, while attending to short- and long-term system capacity building.

One lesson, then, from the 2018 Ontario election is that systems need time to grow: policy and budget commitment, with a clear vision and targets for implementation, must start early in a government’s mandate. Childcare platforms are clearly necessary but are not as important as childcare policy deliberated through comprehensive consultations with stakeholders and implemented early and consistently during a government’s mandate.

Fitting Care into an Election Campaign

Care or the quality of life dominated political debate during the election. The 2018 Liberal campaign focused on a message of “care over cuts” and foregrounded universal programming such as pharma care and childcare. The focus, as described by former Premier Wynne, was, post-recession, on social infrastructure investment, similar to the kind of physical infrastructure investment that had formed part of spending during the economic crisis. A Liberal policy advisor put it another way, “People just understood it [care] better than anything else. It’s in healthcare, it’s in childcare, it’s something that’s consistent throughout some of those social policy pieces and something the people understood, that made sense to folks.” Consistent with Tronto’s (2013) premise that every political party/government/party has a plan “to care” for its citizens, the Conservative informant we interviewed also stated, “people want to know that the government actually cares for me.” The private versus collective orientation of policy logics regarding care was evident in this informant’s use of “me,” which underscores a general Conservative focus on individual choice and responsibility (evident in its tax credit proposal), in contrast to a Liberal/NDP focus on broader childcare policies to address social issues.

Despite this contrast, most informants agreed that caring about voters’ anxieties and fears about what some called “personal economies” is an electoral necessity. This personalization strategy was evident in the Liberals’ call for “helping people in their everyday lives,” the NDP’s focus on childcare offering “peace of mind for parents who want to get ahead,” and advocacy messaging that uses personal stories and “the fears and emotions of parents” to push for change. The Conservative informant emphasized “getting government out of the way so that individuals can make their own decisions” and using “personal stories to relate to everyday people.” Nevertheless, some informants suggested using a personalization strategy cautiously. As not-

[P]ersonalization as a form of populism results in polarization and a tendency to lose “sight of what was really important.” A personalization approach thus tends to result in an obfuscation of high-level policy messaging that focusses on concrete childcare plans.
ed above, this strategy is entangled in Conservative philosophical commitments to individual choice and, specific to the 2018 election campaign, a new kind of conservative populism. As one informant from an advocacy organization remarked, personalization as a form of populism results in polarization and a tendency to lose “sight of what was really important.” A personalization approach thus tends to result in an obfuscation of high-level policy messaging that focusses on concrete childcare plans. Indeed, in the case of the Conservative election campaign, there appeared to be an association between high personalization messaging and limited budget and policy details.

In addition, personal attacks on individual women leaders and a more general antipathy to social-equality informed policy and its advocates formed part of an approach aimed at personalizing voters’ anxieties and fears. This was evident in the cautious and at times antagonist response to NDP and Liberal women leaders talking about their visions of care. One policy advisor informant described the 2018 election as “more about feminist politics and less about party politics.”

Care, however, did have strong cross-party and electoral resonance. There appeared to be consensus regarding the need for certain social investments across the life course, particularly in elder care and in healthcare, recognizing that risks and needs associated with illness, injury, and age are shared by all Ontarians. In childcare, there was consensus that families require support to meet their childcare needs, but political parties diverged on where care should be located and by whom it should be delivered.

In summary, then, it does seem possible to fit care into a campaign, although clearly in an election there are different visions of what care means to political parties. In the case of the 2018 Ontario election, care had meanings difficult to untie from the gender of the leaders of the parties advocating investments. In the end, Conservative populist orientations gained ground and ultimately power in Ontario. The outcome of any election turns on both complex and simple factors; in this case, it is hard to separate personal attacks on former Premier Wynne as an individual and the record of her party in office from the broader question of whether care across the life course is a policy orientation that might counter austerity minded policy.

Gender in Electoral Childcare Debate

Informants from more socially progressive parties and advocacy associations suggested that gender was a salient feature in the framing and reception of childcare platforms. For example, gender was central in Liberal and NDP childcare platforms in relation women’s labour market access. Gordon Cleveland indicated that his free preschool proposal was readily “picked up” as a “very important thing for women and families” by both female and male Liberal cabinet ministers. In describing their childcare platform, a senior NDP politician stated:

[We had to] make the economic argument for early learning and care investment because the return on the investment is very clear. Now the investment does benefit women disproportionately, however, women make up 51% of the population so there is an argument to be made that when we benefit the lives of women, we also strengthen communities and the lives of children.

Informants from advocacy organizations emphasized that their responses to childcare platforms focussed on “the given that women are in the workforce,” which even “Conservatives recognize,” as well as on ECEs (who are predominantly women) struggling to support themselves and their families.

Nevertheless, Liberal politicians and policy advisors interviewed recognized that talking about gender during an election campaign was risky since it could be “seen as being too deeply entrenched in identity politics” or as only “important to women voters who have children and are worried about childcare.” To mitigate these risks, some informants recommended promoting an understanding that childcare is at the intersection of many societal issues. One informant put it another way: “Childcare will not win votes in and of itself,” adding, however, “it’s more of a driver...especially when it fits together coherently with the rest of the plan.”

In concrete terms, former Premier Wynne indicated that the Liberal campaign sought to make childcare part of the broader platform and part of the budget “as opposed to having it as an outlier.” She added, “It’s not as though we’re going to do all these things for the economy and for society and then we’re going to do childcare for this group of people who happen to be women. It wouldn’t have made any sense.”
In the end, a government for whom equality and redistribution goals are not priorities was elected. Does this mean that childcare, as a gender issue, does not resonate with voters? Is aversion to universalism or spending outlays more central to its policy absence? One informant argued that talking about childcare in relation to gender (or vice versa), at least for progressive parties, is “inescapable...you can't have women's equality without universal childcare.” However, decreasing the motherhood wage gap (and improving the wages of ECEs) proves difficult to translate into short-term publicly accessible political messaging. One obvious remedy is to have more women in politics, supported by “a whole lot of other women” to “normalize childcare and...shift it from something that is a dysfunctional welfare service to a public good—something that all of us need and want at different times of our lives and for different reasons.” This suggests that a strong childcare system, once experienced, known, and understood, has policy “legs”; its absence in the social policy landscape makes it hard to conceptualize or imagine, but its presence makes it hard to undo.

In campaigning for universal childcare, however, one challenge became how to foster voter understanding of the complexities of childcare, all the while, adhering to the prescription of simplicity and generating public appeal.

This suggests that a strong childcare system, once experienced, known, and understood, has policy “legs”; its absence in the social policy landscape makes it hard to conceptualize or imagine, but its presence makes it hard to undo.

Best Ways to Communicate a Childcare Platform

Political informants discussed how each platform was positioned within the party’s broader campaign message (e.g., “Care Over Cuts” or “For the People”). As described above by a policy advisor to the Liberal Party, the message was about introducing a comprehensive plan wherein the various pieces, including childcare and higher policy objectives, fit together coherently. In campaigning for universal childcare, however, one challenge became how to foster voter understanding of the complexities of childcare, all the while, adhering to the prescription of simplicity and generating public appeal. For example, Conservative messaging harnessed a simple idea that family is the site of identity (and family knows best). The Conservatives also had an advantage in presenting a childcare plan consistent with other familiar tangible tax credits that Ontario families receive and know. In contrast, the NDP and Liberal parties presented novel proposals that, while appealing to families desperately struggling to access affordable childcare, represented a fundamental, unknown, and uncertain structural shift. Furthermore, these parties were held more accountable for a perceived higher level of government involvement in family life and the costs of their childcare plans. An NDP informant indicated that their plan with a fee structure was a response to criticism that the NDP promotes “big government.” While the Liberal message of free preschool was concise, the proposal entailed significant social investment requiring ample justification, thereby increasing the message’s complexity.

Many informants questioned whether the for-profit/not-for-profit issue also worked against the principle of simplicity in a childcare platform. For NDP informants, this debate is always a key piece of their platform. However, for other informants, the debate distracted from high-level childcare messaging (i.e., a universal system). In addition, from a Liberal perspective, that debate can be easily reduced to an issue of “shutting down women
who provide home childcare.” Several informants suggested that the for-profit/not-for-profit issue is a detail best negotiated and worked out through policy development before or after an election rather than during a polarizing campaign.

Some political informants highlighted that the role of party leaders is to meet people where they are at (e.g., doing the best they can to find childcare) and not necessarily to educate the public on issues such as profit making in a childcare market system. Moreover, platforms must reflect which aspects of a policy will resonate best with voters. However, this means that progressive parties with comprehensive childcare plans have the challenge of bridging a significant gap between expert knowledge and the public’s current understanding of childcare issues.

Based, then, on informant perspectives, it appears best to ensconce childcare within other policy and equality policies, communicate a simple message, avoid details that distract from the key message, provide effective rationale for policy changes, and account for costs.

Some informants referenced British Columbia’s “uncomplicated” $10-a-day plan advanced by BC advocates for years until the current NDP government took it up. According to one informant, the “beauty” of this communication is that it only shows “the tip of policy iceberg,” while underneath, and unseen by most voters, is a massive childcare infrastructure plan that engages the sector. However, as the government, the Liberals had to account for the details (i.e., costs) beneath their free preschool plan, whereas the Conservative and NDP plans were criticized for lacking details.

These findings raise a question about whether it is more effective for unified coalitions of advocates to push for a particular childcare plan. Some advocacy work can focus on identifying effective rationales for a publicly funded childcare system. Liberal and NDP informants reported struggling to position the costs of a public system in light of Conservative attacks on government deficits. As one Liberal informant noted, the problem with universal childcare “becomes that it’s a lot of money for not necessarily a lot of political payback.” While these informants preferred to use a “public good” rather than an economic rationale for their childcare plans, they maintained this rationale is necessary to counter the “public vulnerability” that progressive governments accumulate huge deficits. Less constrained by this vulnerability, advocates can draw on a range of rationales.

Based, then, on informant perspectives, it appears best to ensconce childcare within other policy and equality policies, communicate a simple message, avoid details that distract from the key message, provide effective rationale for policy changes, and account for costs.

**Next Steps for Advocacy Organizations**

Many findings in this article point to potential next steps for advocacy organizations; this section highlights
two more. Moving forward, advocacy organizations need, as one political informant described it, “a sense of hope and collaborative relationships.” This hope builds on the fact that, in the 2018 Ontario election, two political parties envisioned universality, confirming one of OCBCC’s advocacy messages that “universal childcare is possible.” Furthermore, informants from advocacy organizations viewed their work with political parties as much stronger in the 2018 election than in 2014, particularly in “positioning childcare as a public responsibility.” In anticipating future Liberal leadership campaigns, former Premier Wynne recommended that advocacy organizations meet with each candidate to discuss their positions on childcare and challenge regressive approaches. Meetings with NDP MPPs who champion childcare could potentially refine their 2018 childcare plan for the next election. A key reason for building these relationships with progressive parties is to push for childcare platforms that retain the “visionary boldness” and practicality of the 2018 platforms. At the same time, an informant from an advocacy organization described future work: “What we want to do is bring the childcare community together and have a really clear plan and a really clear vision of what we want. We want to be able to say that everybody’s together on this; this is the plan that we want, this is the change we want.”

“In promoting a vision for childcare in Ontario, some informants questioned the non-partisan stance of childcare advocacy organizations. From their perspective, if a political party is proposing to make universal childcare possible then advocates should champion the proposal. One informant suggested looking to the education and health sectors where advocacy organizations are more likely to publicly favour one party over another with the aim of getting this party elected and a public policy in place. Another suggested approach for advocates is to avoid getting “distracted by” tax-credit-based childcare messaging and getting into a “conundrum of deciding between the NDP and Liberal...we should have been getting people out there voting NDP or Liberal but just not Conservative. Our messaging power was weaker because of it.”

Taken all together, the findings indicate that advocates have much work to do. Prior to the 2018 election, childcare advocates maintained a more cooperative relationship with a Liberal government. Their current relationship with a Conservative government is increasingly conflictual (Langford, Prentice, Richardson, Albanese, 2016). This means that advocates must both intensify responses to regressive childcare policies and plan for the next election, while potentially publicly supporting policies that foster high-quality, accessible, public-administered childcare. This means that advocates must both intensify responses to regressive childcare policies and plan for the next election, while potentially publicly supporting policies that foster high-quality, accessible, public-administered childcare.
Conclusion

In this article, our intention was to capture all that was happening with childcare policy before the Conservative government took office. In documenting the perspectives of those actively involved in the election, we hope that we will not have to re-do all that has already been done to get back to where we were before the 2018 provincial election. In this way, we are trying to create a kind of institutional *memoire* for policy makers, advocacy organizations, and researchers. We hope our examination of research findings will provoke recollections about the 2018 childcare campaigns and discussions among stakeholders about moving forward with childcare policy in Ontario.

References


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Madison Banks is an Early Childhood Educator and a graduate of the Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Studies Program at Ryerson University. She has been a front line worker in the field of early childhood for over 10 years and completed her Masters Research Paper on the topic of young motherhood. Her areas of research include the feminist ethics of care, motherhood studies and family support services.
From the Editor

Although the peer reviewed collection for the Fall 2019 eceLINK does not have a special focus, the two articles offered fit together in ways that open up critical discussion about our ideas of early childhood educators. Meaghan MacDonell and Lisa McCorquodale’s article describes research that investigated what Ontario high school students learn about early childhood educators in two college preparation courses. The authors’ research reveals that high school students (and particularly those who go on to post-secondary ECE programs) emerge from these courses with a conventional, outdated and limited understanding of the work early childhood educators do. Consequently, the authors argue that the high school courses reproduce the simplistic and maternalistic understandings of early childhood educators that circulate widely in our society. Lisa Johnson’s article shows why these understandings do not accurately represent the profoundly thoughtful and complex political and ethical work of early childhood educators. Drawing on a particular event in the life of her preschool program, Johnson interrogates theoretical and system influences that caused her to doubt her own ‘goodness’ as an educator. She uses other theories to think differently about the event, and to alternatively imbue the event with vitality and hope. In the article’s conclusion, Johnson claims a new stance as the (not) good educator. Taken together, the exciting articles in this peer-reviewed collection are a powerful testament to the changes needed to transform how others, and we, think and talk about early childhood educators. On this basis perhaps, the articles should be required readings for high school teachers and students, as well as for faculty and students in ECE programs across Ontario.

Rachel Langford PhD
Hidden Messages: Barriers Toward Professional Recognition

Meaghan MacDonell & Lisa McCorquodale

Abstract

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) field faces many challenges. Poor compensation, difficult working conditions, and low professional recognition in particular have had a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of quality Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). This research considers how the language used in public discourse around the ECEC field contributes to knowledge, understanding, and, ultimately, the value placed on childcare professionals. A qualitative content analysis of two publicly available Ontario secondary school curriculum documents is used to gain insight into how the language used affects perceptions of ECE’s. Primary findings reveal a construct of ECEs characterized by a limited professional identity. The article argues that such a construct and its language undermine the professional status of educators and justifies the inequitable way ECEs are compensated for their work.

Key words

Professional recognition, professional identity, early childhood educators, content analysis.

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Meaghan is an Early Childhood Educator from London, Ontario with experience in a variety of child care and community settings. She recently completed her Honours BA of Early Childhood Leadership from Fanshawe College. Meaghan is currently the Project Coordinator at Strive, a collaborative group of Child Care and Early Years Practitioners who support learning and development to enhance quality practice and build professional capacity.

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Hidden Messages: Barriers Toward Professional Recognition

Authors’ Prologue:

Meaghan shares: I fail to recall a time when my professional aspirations did not in some way align with the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). I consider myself a passionate advocate for the field and am happy to espouse the merits of my chosen profession to anyone who will listen. However, when explaining what it I do professionally, I am continually met with misunderstanding and what I can only describe as veiled disappointment. Many times over my career I have felt disrespected and disregarded as a professional, and this has had a significant impact on my sense of professional self-worth. It is an experience of true cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, I am resolute about the indisputable value and importance of my role; yet on the other, I struggle to rationalize that value and conceive of a professional identity in the face of a public discourse that continually undermines it.

Lisa shares: I came to the field in a circuitous manner, having spent many years working as an occupational therapist. Through graduate school and, eventually, personal and professional experiences, I became increasingly passionate about how children are cared for and educated and saw myself as an ally of the field of ECEC. While I grew increasingly enamoured with the field, many questioned why I would align myself with a field that, in the words of one colleague, was “essentially about babysitting.” It irritated me to hear these words and it was frustrating to know public understanding of the field was still lagging so far behind the actual practice. When I met Meaghan, the first author, and she too spoke of these challenges, we knew we wanted to explore public perceptions of the field. We found ourselves drawn to issues surrounding professional identity development, and both of us are keen to advance the professional status of those who work in the early years sector. In this paper, we discuss the year-long process we undertook to better understand these issues.

Tackling Public Perception

In Canada, the field of ECEC has been working toward full professionalization (Roach O’Keefe, Hooper, & Jakubiec, 2019). One important step was the Ontario government’s passage of the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007, which, over two decades of lobbying, was a legislative coup for early learning professionals in the province (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2018b). The Act established the College of Early Childhood Educators, which officially began accepting applicants in September of 2008. This College recognizes the field and monitors the scope and standards of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in Ontario. Additional efforts toward professionalization include extensive advocacy work the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) has undertaken to highlight the complexity of the early years field (AECEO’s Decent Work Task Force, 2017).
Despite these important steps toward professionalization, the field remains poorly understood, poorly paid (likely because it is dominated by women), and, ironically, never more in-demand by working families. Professionalization has not rectified wage imbalances, nor has it changed public perception.

Since the inception of childcare outside the home, women have predominately facilitated the care and education of young children outside of the home (Van Laere, Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Peeters, 2014). In Canada alone, 98% of the ECEC workforce identifies as female (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). As has routinely been the struggle encountered by other traditionally female sectors such as nursing and social work (Nova Scotia Child Care Association, 2019), markedly low rates of compensation, precarious working conditions, and low professional recognition make the recruitment and retention of quality ECEs an ongoing challenge (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). In the continued work toward elevating the professional status of the ECEC field, we, as well as others (e.g., Langford, Albanese, Bezanson, Prentice, Richardson, & White, 2017; Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016), argue that consideration should be given to the language used in public discourse concerning the field. Doing so may offer a more fulsome understanding of the perceptions that contribute to the hiring crisis and lack of professional recognition.

Discourse in this context is understood to be “a specific series of representations, practices, and performances through which meanings are produced, connected into networks, and legitimized” (Gregory, 2000, p. 180). Discourses have a strong influence in structuring social realities as well as shaping how individuals develop a sense of identity, and discourses have the power to reproduce ways of knowing and being (Gregory, 2000). Foucault (1988) suggests that all discourses have the potential to be dangerous if not habitually reflected upon and questioned.

An understanding of the public discourses that dominate discussions about the role of an ECE has the potential to shed light on, and ultimately dismantle, common misconceptions about careers in early childhood education and elevate the field’s reputation. To do so, educators and allies can look to a variety of sources.

In this research, we have chosen to focus on how the sector is discussed at the secondary school level. The Ontario Secondary Social Sciences curriculum currently offers two courses with an early years focus: Working with Infants and Young Children and Working with School-Age Children and Adolescents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). These courses are geared to students interested in fields that work with children, and ECEC is among them. This paper explores the process we undertook to examine these documents through content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017). Part of our aim was to critically examine how these documents discuss the field of ECEC, and therefore how these documents can shape high school students’ perceptions of the field. Some of these students may then carry these perceptions into the field upon entry into postsecondary ECE programs.
Contextualizing the ECEC Field

We have chosen to highlight three issues that we believe, both from our experiences in the field and a lengthy review of the literature, help contextualize how the ECEC field is currently understood in Ontario. Specifically, we discuss how the field is heavily influenced by:

- issues related to gender;
- discourse related to issues of care versus education; and
- the way the issues above impact candidates applying to the field.

A Highly Gendered Field

Ontario’s market-style childcare model, which by default became a system that has continuously reinforced neoliberal, patriarchal values (Doherty, Friendly, & Forer, 2002), is one where:

the education of young children was seen as an acceptable form of female employment because it allowed women the opportunity to have a social life and have a job outside the home while conforming to the patriarchal model of the bourgeoisie that embodies the idea that women naturally take care of children (Van Laere et al., 2014, p. 234).

We argue that many educators continue to see this patriarchal model as natural and have internalized beliefs that women are best suited to care for children. This perpetuates the challenges early years professionals face. Men continue to join the field at appallingly low rates, representing only 1 to 4% of the ECEC workforce (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014; Van Laere et al., 2014). In Ontario, of the 53,000 members of the College of Early Childhood Educators, only 2% identify as male (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2018). The causes and consequences of this gender disparity are highly debated, but the identity of the field as a feminized profession is indisputable.

In addition to a significant gender imbalance, attrition rates and staff shortages in the field remain devastatingly high as a consequence of low professional status, poor compensation, and difficult working conditions (Chang-Kredl & Kinglsey, 2014). In North America, it is estimated that 50% of new ECEs will leave the sector within the first five years. A survey of Ontario’s childcare workforce found that, on average, childcare providers work in the field for no more than 12 years, with a quarter spending less than five years in the field (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018, p.12).

As a result of low wages that continue to dominate in large part because women’s work continues to be undervalued, many skilled and trained individuals leverage themselves into other avenues of education or exit the sector entirely (Sumsion, 2002; Chang-Kredl & Kinglsey, 2014). These levels of attrition have a crippling effect on the quality and effective operation of programs for children and families (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018).
Care Versus Education

In addition to the highly gendered nature of the field, there is continued ambivalence about an educator’s scope of practice: “Historically, ECEC builds on two traditions: care and education” (Van Laere et al., 2014, p. 233). It is the relationship between the two that has warranted so much discussion and debate within the field. While not incompatible, the terms aspire to and inspire very different things. ECEC has gained considerable momentum over the last several decades (Van Laere, Peeters, & Vandenbroeck, 2012). Advances in brain research demonstrating the criticality of this developmental period have helped boost recognition for the need and importance of quality care experiences in the early years in both public and political agendas (Van Laere et al., 2012). Many studies have demonstrated that high-quality early education and care experiences improve child outcomes in multiple ways (Boyd, 2013). Yet despite this increasing body of knowledge and public interest, early childhood care work remains amongst the poorest paid professions (Phillips, Austin, & Whitebook, 2016). The crux of the issue is often thought to be found in how care specifically is evaluated in Western society and its relationship with education (Moss, 2017).

Caring, responsive interactions between educators and children are understood to be at the heart of quality programming and successful outcomes (Phillips et al., 2016). James (2012) thoughtfully reminds educators that “Students who experience a caring relationship with their (educators) are more likely to develop the self-esteem and the trust necessary to take risks and reach higher levels of academic achievement” (James, 2012, p. 173).

These interactions and the development of connections between an educator and her (or his) students can be both laborious and emotionally taxing (Gaskell & McLaren, 1987). For laypersons, however, often in the capacity of public investors, cultivating caring relationships is often still seen as an innate ability of women rather than a skill that is acquired through training and experience. A workforce strategy for early years and childcare was released by the Ontario government in the spring of 2018. Educators surveyed to inform this report stated that their roles were often compared to childminding or babysitting rather than to that of education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). The reduction of early childhood care work to something purely maternal (and therefore expected and effortless) negates the value of specialized training and education required for the profession (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016). These social perceptions of care blur the lines between the public and the private spheres and, in doing so, also blur the role of the ECE, who becomes less educator and more “other mother” (Nelson, 1990). Because mothers (and fathers) care for their children privately in the home for free, the task is not only perceived as natural but also menial (Van Laere et al., 2014). Being a good professional in this context becomes synonymous with being a good mother, and motherhood is not considered to be a role that requires any unique skill or ability (Van Laere et al., 2014). When seeking professional recognition, this positioning of educator as carer and therefore as pseudo-parent detracts from an ECE’s ability to garner professional capital or fair compensation.
To combat this challenge, early years’ experts and policymakers worldwide have engaged in a “schoolification” process with the aim of likening ECEC care programs to more formal schooling. The theory was that there would be a commensurate elevation of the field and an enhanced willingness to better compensate ECEs by bringing early learning into the public education system. In our estimation, however, early learning pedagogy has been erroneously and narrowly defined as specific skill acquisition through this schoolification process. Van Laere et al. (2012) argue that the public, including parents, have adopted these narrow views of early years pedagogy as indicators of quality care and education. This limited definition of the work involved means that early learning professionals remain woefully undercompensated, and the field remains mired in the discourses rooted in concepts about the private sphere and gender that circulate regarding the care and education of young children. Ultimately, distancing the field from care has not led to professional progress (Mallozzi & Galman, 2014).

Not surprisingly, there is significant opposition to the schoolification of early learning, with the argument that care is equally important, if not superceding, education in early years pedagogy (James, 2012). Nel Noddings (2002), for example, an American philosopher, feminist, and central theorist on the relationship between care and education states that care extends well beyond a singular act of maintenance or supervision and is far more complex than a feeling of interest or affection. According to Noddings (2002), care demands reciprocity and involves not only assessing but also meeting a child’s needs in an appropriate and responsive manner. Care is an intentional act driven by skill and effort and is not only fundamental but educational as well (Noddings, 2002). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review all that has been written about the role of care in early years pedagogy, there are other well-written sources that address this topic in a more fulsome manner (e.g., Langford et al., 2017).

As alluded to above, a common criticism of schoolification is that it detracts from the social–emotional nurturing of young children in favour of cognitive competencies alone (Nelson, 1990). The drive for greater accountability and competitive standing on international ranking systems such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) puts academic outcomes at the forefront while leaving care, something far less measurable and quantifiable, behind (Van Laere et al., 2014). Similar to the comparison to mothering, care is seen as being reduced to the mere servicing of children’s basic needs and hygiene (Van Laere et al., 2012). “Important interactions such as feeding, putting children to bed, going to the toilet are stripped of their educational value” (Van Laere et al., 2012, p. 536). Such an interpretation diminishes the value of care but equally reduces the value of education to something measured in cognitive gains alone (Van Laere et al., 2012). French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault argues that to diminish the role of care in learning is to fail to recognize the obvious connection between the physical and cognitive/emotional needs of an individual (1988).
The ECE profession’s relationship to care has a well-documented influence on the way early years services are delivered, perceived, and valued. The ongoing ways in which society continues this discourse about care and education can have a profound effect on the trajectory of the field. Professionalization is a vital and necessary goal for the ECEC field and is one necessary path to adequate compensation and public recognition. However, such steps need not narrowly define early years educational pedagogy nor distance the field from care.

The preceding background information illuminates important debates in the field and contextualizes discourses that dominate the field. The intent of our research is to offer a more fulsome understanding of these public discourses by considering the messaging high school students receive about ECEC as a career option and more broadly about the roles ECEs play in caring for and educating Ontario’s young children.

Pre-service Expectations and Post-secondary Decision Making

The types of candidates enrolling in ECE programs at the post-secondary level have come under scrutiny by both college instructors and those conducting the supervision of students’ mandatory field placement experiences, who cite an urgent need for greater self-advocacy and attitudes from students that will undermine rather than perpetuate negative social attitudes toward the sector (Langford, 2008). This scrutiny calls into question students’ general understanding of the field prior to enrolment, with one instructor noting that it is simply not enough to “love children” when it comes to being an effective ECE (Langford, 2008). The likening of ECEC to mothering in the dominant public discourse discussed above is undoubtedly a compounding factor. Students arrive in ECE programs with preconceived notions about caring for young children based primarily on their own experiences in or with caring relationships (James, 2012). In an examination of early years educator’s pre-service expectations, when asked why they had chosen that vocational pathway, the majority of respondents noted childhood experiences of playing teacher, the influence of female family members who were also educators and the profession’s compatibility with motherhood as the driving forces (Chang-Kredl & Kinglsey, 2014). When asked what specific skills or capacities suited them for the field most respondents noted “altruism,” “empathy,” and “patience” (Chang-Kredl & Kinglsey, 2014).

Similarly, in a self-reflection assignment for an ECEC post-secondary class, students were asked to consider influences on their practices and role as ECEs (Langford, 2008). Thirty-four out of 50 students referenced “making a difference” as being a primary motivator (Langford, 2008). In the same assignment, students also described a higher purpose of building a just and democratic society, while some students referenced scientific data collected by the Canadian Council on Social Development that suggested that high-quality early years care can mediate the effects of poverty (Langford, 2008). The identity of the ECE has become highly idealized, both altruistically revered and driven by relational emotion (Chang-Kredl & Kinglsey, 2014). When ultimately confronted with the challenges of the work itself, however, students were forced to question their original motivations (Chang-Kredl
& Kinglsey, 2014). This intersection and conflict between emotionally driven pre-service assumptions and the complex realities of a career in ECEC help to explain the attrition rates in the field (Sumsion, 2002). The lived experience does not match the expectation (Sumsion, 2002). In a phenomenological case study of one educator’s journey into and ultimately out of ECEC, researcher Jennifer Sumsion (2002) noted that the personal qualities an individual brings to practice factor just as heavily as their pre-service understanding of the profession on their decision to remain in the field or to leave. Mis-messaging which leads to misunderstanding about the profession could be at the root of this issue.

So what factors do influence a secondary school student’s post-secondary career choice and development of a professional identity? In a paper designed to understand which variables and identity factors best predicted the likelihood of a student entering teacher education or the teaching profession the authors note that “a crucial point in decisions regarding career choice is the match between a person’s expectations and wants from a career and the extent to which they believe that these expectations and wants are met by a particular career” (Lofstrom, Poom-Valickis, Hannula, & Mathews, 2010, p. 168). Both aspiring teachers and ECEs are motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. As previously noted, intrinsically, those drawn to the early years are fuelled by altruism and social justice (Chang-Kredl & Kinglsey, 2014). Extrinsically, students report seeking secure roles they can pursue as a lifelong career (Lofstrom et al., 2010). So, although the reasons for entry into ECEC might be intrinsic altruism, it is the extrinsic benefits that determine long-term commitment (Lofstrom et al., 2010). It may therefore be supposed that young people initially interested in early learning pathways may forgo childcare for other career avenues if the compensation, working conditions, and overall social status make those alternates more attractive options (Lofstrom et al., 2010). Therefore, messaging to students in the process of deciding on post-secondary/career choices needs to reflect the ECEC field as a dynamic and developing profession.

We have thus far highlighted two issues in the ECEC field that have heavily influenced its current standing in public discourses: the gendered nature of the field and the care vs education debate. How do these issues impact high school students’ perceptions of the field, and by extension their decision to enter the field? These issues intersect and the result is poor compensation, difficult working conditions, and low professional recognition. This result has a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of quality educators and has placed the field in crisis (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018).

Designing the Study

One way to enable progress may be to understand how the profile of the field is disseminated through messaging that high school students receive about the field of ECEC. To this end, we undertook a qualitative content analysis of two publicly available Ontario secondary curriculum documents. These curricula are meant for upper-level high school students interested in careers working with children and families. To our knowledge, little work has been done to understand the content of these
documents and how they influence high school students’ perceptions of and recruitment into the field of ECEC.

We employed post-modern feminist perspectives as frameworks throughout this inquiry. It has been proposed that the subordination of women in the workplace and the over-representation of women in poorly compensated caring roles, such as those fulfilled by ECEs, can largely explain the gendered labour market inequities that exist in Western society (Bernstein, Marie-Josee, & Vallee, 2009). Post-modern feminism delineates from other branches of feminism through the attestation that language is a vehicle of subordination, with the ability to neglect the female experience (Butler, 1999) and “is predicated on the premise that the male/female dichotomy is the driving force of modern society” (Pomeroy, Holleran, & Kiam, 2004, p. 40). Given the highly gendered nature of the ECEC field and the ongoing struggles faced by ECEs to achieve greater professional recognition and compensation, a post-modern feminist lens is a good fit for taking a critical look at these issues.

Study Documents

We selected two Social Science and Humanities Ontario high school curriculum documents, Working with Infants and Young Children (HPW3C) and Working with School-Age Children and Adolescents (HPD4C), for analysis. The documents are used by students making timetable decisions, guidance counsellors assisting with course selection, and teachers assigned to deliver the courses. Both courses are designated as college preparation courses offered at the Grade 11 (HPW3C) and Grade 12 (HPD4C) levels: “College preparation courses are designed to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the requirements for entrance to most college programs or for admission to specific apprenticeship or other training programs” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 13). The most recent publicly available enrolment stats from the 2015–2016 academic year show that of the 346,854 students enrolled in Grade 11 and Grade 12, 5,623 took HPW3C and 1,900 took HPD4C (Government of Ontario, 2019; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019). We selected these two course documents most relevant to the broad field of ECEC and are intended to be taken by high school students interested in a career with children. There were no ethical issues to address as the documents are publicly available. These courses were selected as they relate specifically to the breadth of Early Childhood Education knowledge, services, and pathways. The focus of this research was on discovering what messages may exist in these documents related to both gender and the professional status of ECEC.

Study Methodology

Our intent in this content analysis is to understand how language is employed within Ontario’s secondary school curriculum documents to describe the ECEC field. We believe language and culture profoundly, though often unconsciously, shape the ways our society views and feels about the world
Language is neither neutral nor passive (Foucault, 1988) and shapes attitudes and opinions and reinforces injurious stereotypes (Butler, 1999). Gendered language has long been employed to sustain power structures in society (Bagshaw, 2006).

**Content Analysis**

Content analysis is a methodology “that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomenon” (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 9). Content analysis is useful for all types of written texts and can be integral in uncovering hidden aspects and/or meanings within a text (Neuendorf, 2017). Implicit messages such as gender stereotyping can be revealed through content analysis (Neuman & Robson, 2009). We argue, as part of our central inquiry, that gendered discourse relating to professional identity, both manifest and latent, affects not only the overall structure of the ECEC sector, but also the ways in which the field comes to be understood and perceived by the public. Because we were seeking to understand how written/symbolic variables (i.e., words and phrases) within these documents potentially influence perception, content analysis was the most effective methodology.

We used a critical approach during the document analysis as we sought to recognize, expose, and oppose social stratification (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontologically, research with a critical bent describes reality within its cultural, historical, and political contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Content analysis is a frequently used methodology for a critical approach as the focus is not only on the language or structure of language, but also on the semantics of social and cultural functions and constructs (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

**Data Analysis**

We were interested in both manifest content, for example how often particular words or concepts appeared (e.g., professional), as well as latent content, such as the underlying meaning in the documents (Neuman & Robson, 2009). Neuman & Robson describe manifest content as tangible surface data; in our study, it was counted for frequency, and latent content was thematically or qualitatively analyzed. See Table 1 for a sample of our coding. During manifest coding, words relating to professional identity/vocation as well as the conflict between care and education in the ECEC field were of major interest. We also counted the frequency of the title “Early Childhood Educator.” We made note of the presentation of elements, including what words, if any, were chosen to be in larger font or hold prominence in space and position within the texts.

Latent coding questions were also used to guide the analysis. These questions related to both characteristics of the documents themselves as well as the theme of professional identity. It was through this semantic analysis of the texts that we came to understand the implicit meanings within the documents (Neuendorf, 2017).
Table 1. Concepts Explored During Content Analysis

**Manifest Content**

- Career Description:
  - This concept included words such as job, career, work(er), profession(al)

- Role Description:
  - This concept included words such as care, educate, education, teach

**Latent Content**

- Characteristics of the document:
  - What is the purpose of the document?
  - When was it published?
  - Who is the intended audience?
  - How is the document organized?
  - What words are emphasized through use of increased font size, bolding or italicized text, capitalization, placement in headings or titles, or through frequent repetition?

- Professional identity:
  - How is the ECE described in the document?
  - What are the essential skills and competencies described?
  - To what extent is the educator described as a professional?
  - To what extent are care and education described within the document?
  - What other words are used in replacement of Early Childhood Education?

**Findings**

Analysis of the two documents reveals a compelling commentary on the ECEC field. The findings reflect a distinct construct of a limited professional identity for ECEs in comparison with the identity of the group working with the school-age children and adolescents. Findings are presented in two main themes: a) a narrow conception of ECEC, and b) the professional status of the ECE.
A Narrow Conception of Early Childhood Education and Care

Early childhood professionals are well aware of not only how increasingly complex and important their roles are but also of the significant growth and demand the field is currently experiencing (AECEO’s Decent Work Task Force, 2017; Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016). Yet what is presented within the HPW3C and HPD4C documents is a reductionist representation of the field. Both documents are divided into five sections: Research and Inquiry Skills, Growth and Development, Employment Opportunities and Requirements, Interacting with Children (or Interacting with School-Age Children and Adolescents), and Addressing Social Challenges. Each section outlines what students enrolled in these courses can anticipate learning.

What is presented within the documents is a simplistic overview of what working early learning professionals know to be an increasingly complex role (Boyd, 2013). The sections on growth and development yield a basic conception of knowledge concerning early learning. While the HPW3C document in one instance references child development as being holistic in nature, the overall focus is instead on deterministic developmental concepts such as “patterns” and “milestones.” This focus reflects an “ages and stages” rhetoric no longer considered reliable or appropriate by early learning professionals (Burman, 2016). References to developmental theories no longer considered the backbone of the field (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015) may be explained by the 2013 publication date, which is prior to the release of How Does Learning Happen? (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) an arguably more post-modern pedagogical approach focusing on meaning-making through inquiry and co-constructed learning (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). That said, the curriculum document continues a discourse that presents the scope of practice through a narrow and outdated lens that only contributes to misunderstanding the role and function of childcare professionals and impedes the journey toward greater professional recognition, a journey that will rely, in large part, on public support and advocacy (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016).

A comparison of the HPW3C and HPD4C strands on employment opportunities and requirements offers an equally narrow view of the ECEC field when describing the types of opportunities available. In HPW3C, “home childcare, preschool programs, nannies, drop-in programs, early learning centres, [and] family resource programs” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 271) are listed, while in HPD4C, “before-school and after-school programs, summer camps, parks and recreation programs, [and] treatment centres” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 293). The vital contributions ECEs make in other professional avenues such as colleges, universities, policy and government, leadership and research, and in various health care agencies, just to name a few, are noticeably absent. This is by no means to diminish those pathways that are listed but rather to illustrate that ECEs are presented in a very specific capacity and that a fragmented concept of the services ECEs provide only serves to limit their professional identity.
Professional Status of the Early Childhood Educator

The second theme that became apparent in our data analysis reflects the perception of professionalism in the field. Inferences concerning professional status were examined through the vocational descriptors throughout the documents. These descriptors were derived from an inventory analysis of terms associated with vocation and from empirical research on the order of professionalization. As illustrated in Figure 1, there is a limited range of terms used to denote the role of the educator in both documents. What emerges as a result is the image of the educator, not as a professional, but rather as a worker, a term often defined by menial or manual tasks. The notion of an individual who works with children is, in and of itself, unproblematic, but the absence of an equal narrative likening that individual to a career professional minimizes the status of the individual and the field itself. If we in the profession want to consider re-envisioning ECEC with a mind toward progress; as Moss (2006) states, we need to “start with critical questions about how the work is understood and what values are considered important” (p. 39). Increased professionalization is an explicit goal for the ECEC sector (AECEO’s Decent Work Task Force, 2017; Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018), one that requires greater recognition for the contributions and skills of educators. It is therefore the exclusive use of the term worker within these documents and the equal lack of terms such as Early Childhood Educator and professional with which we take issue as they do not effectively communicate the same social value.

Figure 1: Occurrence of Professional Nomenclature
The identity of early learning and care work as a career is noticeably minimized throughout the documents as well. "Career Pathways" does appear as a heading in \textit{HPD4C} under the employment opportunities and requirements section but is not elaborated upon or repeated anywhere else in the document. The appearance of the word \textit{career}, however limited, in the school-age children and adolescents document alone is perhaps best explained by the "significant professional disparities which persist between educators of young children and those of school-age children" (AECEO's Decent Work Task Force, 2017, p. 9). The introduction of the Full-day Kindergarten (FDK) Program further illustrated this issue as ECEs in FDK classrooms report feeling held in unequal professional esteem by their teacher colleagues (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016). The use of the term \textit{career} in one document and not the other does suggest a potential bias between the perceived legitimacy of work with older, school-age children and that with very young children and infants.

When coding for the concept of \textit{professional}, we found that it appears almost exclusively in the context of professional development. While the idea of professional development for educators should suggest and reinforce the belief that educators are trained professionals, once again, absent of any further discussion of professional attributes and/or professional status, it does little to evoke that image.

Perhaps of most significance to this analysis is the section of the curriculum in which these course descriptions are located—\textit{Family Studies}. Both \textit{HPW3C} and \textit{HPD4C} appear in a sub-section called "Raising and Caring for Children." The courses appearing within this sub-section draw specific associations not to professional preparation, but instead to parenting or more specifically still to mothering. A third course in the same section is called "Raising Healthy Children" (\textit{HPC30}) and focusses on "the skills and knowledge parents, guardians, and caregivers need" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 277) for effective child rearing. The course placement within the "Raising and Caring for Children." sub-section establishes links among these three courses that only serve to associate the role of the educators with that of pseudoparents. This muddies the distinction between private and public acts of care and creates an obvious distance from the need for any associated professional training or expertise.

\textbf{Discussion and Implications}

Through this research we aimed to consider how discourse around the ECEC field, specifically that presented in the \textit{Working with Infants and Young Children (HPW3C)} and \textit{Working with School-Age Children and Adolescents (HPD4C)} curriculum documents, limits high school students' knowledge, understanding and perhaps ultimately value placed on childcare professionals. We argue that in the case of ECEC, where popular discourses have been historically limiting to the professional recognition
and status of educators, challenging these traditional ways of knowing is critical. The two documents analyzed in this research are one significant medium through which future members of the public and future educators, specifically the approximately 7,500 students enrolled in these courses annually (Government of Ontario, 2019) can obtain information about the ECEC field. These courses have been designed to “prepare students for occupations involving children” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 266) and presumably students electing to take them have some interest in possibly pursuing educational and/or career pathways in this area of study.

Given that these courses may be a student’s first exposure to the ECEC field, how the profession and role of the ECE are presented is important to current and future constructions of knowledge. When considered in the context of recruitment if, as the research suggests, students are largely motivated toward professions in which an attractive degree of social status is associated (Lofstrom et al., 2010), then messaging about ECEC that distances the field from high levels of professionalization is ultimately counterproductive.

Analysis of the HPW3C and HPD4C revealed both a limited and outdated conception of the ECEC field and an image of the educator void of professional association. This is in stark contrast to the significant steps the field has taken in order to professionalize. In his seminal work on the evolution of professionalization, American sociologist Harold Wilensky (1964) lists several processes or occurrences through which professions develop or become established. First, there is the association among professionals. This can be through formal or informal structures that allow participants to exchange information, provide one another with support, and lobby and advocate on behalf of their work. There is also control of the work, often in the form of licensing and regulations to practice. These measures provide professional accountability and protect the public. Wilensky also points to professional education, the pursuit of professional knowledge, and profession-dominated worksites (1964). In her work on professionalism in ECEC, author and ECE professor Stephanie Feeney also defined criteria through which a profession is established:

A specialized body of knowledge and expertise, prolonged training, rigorous requirements for entry to training and eligibility to practice, standards of practice, commitment to serving a significant social value, recognition as the only group who can perform a function, autonomy, and a code of ethics (Roach O’Keefe et al., 2019, p.22).

ECEC in Ontario has achieved all the listed benchmarks of what constitutes a profession. The practice of ECEs is regulated by the College of Early Childhood Educators in accordance with the regulations and bylaws made under the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007. “Early Childhood Educator” and “Registered Early Childhood Educator” are protected titles. ECE practices adhere to a code of ethics and standards of practice. Specialized ECE education exists at the Diploma, Bachelors, and Masters levels. In addition, countless professional associations, communities of practice, and academic publications exist to unify and expand knowledge and practice. Yet despite all these achievements,
which have been empirically demonstrated to denote professionalization, professional recognition for the field and for educators remains markedly low. Poor working conditions and low rates of compensation have long been regarded as significant barriers to mobilizing the professional status of ECEs (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016).

While improvements to the way the sector is funded would undoubtedly remedy one barrier, the significant issue of identity remains. Research suggests that identity is socially constructed and is continuously being produced and reproduced through reflexive dialogue between the individual and society (Gergen, 1994). Daily interactions with people and policies that hold a limited understanding of the work of ECEs can only serve to cyclically impede on the self-actualization of ECEs as professionals as well as how they are held in the public’s esteem. Descriptions of the field and the role of the ECE found within the HPW3C and HPD4C documents do little to positively contribute to that elevated understanding by presenting a limited breadth of knowledge and the image of the educator as worker and not as professional. Further, Christiansen (2004) found that when an individual perceives positive social reinforcement with respect to their professional choices, it enhances a positive sense of identity. By replacing vocational descriptors with more positive social connotations, such a professional or career, the HPW3C and HPD4C documents could contribute to enhanced social capital for ECEs. Language is loaded with social values; it shapes social attitudes and opinions and reinforces stereotypes. The use of language revealed in our findings offers a very specific attitude concerning the professional status of ECEs, one marked with images of menial labour rather than professional expertise.

Absent from the aforementioned conceptions of professionalization are how personal characteristics and demographics also impact professional evolution and professional identity. The struggle for professionalization in ECEC cannot be separated from the issue of gender. Gender still impacts the way society conceives of and thinks about professionalism (Nova Scotia Child Care Association, 2019). Work in the early years continues to be likened in public discourse to the otherwise private act of raising children, blurring the lines between public and private acts of care, a narrative that has long been used to limit the social mobility of women who perform care work professionally (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2010). While the contents of the documents are not gendered, their proximity to the ideologies of parenting contributes to a patriarchal rhetoric concerning the “naturalness” necessary for the care of young children. It becomes easy to justify limited professional capital and poor rates of compensation when the work of ECEs is consistently likened to the role of mothering, something that traditionally takes place privately in the home for free (Van Laere et al., 2014). Presenting these courses in this context detracts from their otherwise stated purpose of occupational preparation. The narrow conception of knowledge about ECEC evident within the documents equally contributes to this same limiting narrative based in traditional and outdated notions of linear universalities of development (Burman, 2016). “The very traditional alignments of early childhood work have potentially disempowered ECEs from asserting their professional status” (Roach O’Keefe et al., 2019, p.30). (Roach O’Keefe, Hooper, & Jakubiec, 2019, p. 30).
Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations to the study relate primarily to the scope of the findings. Analysis was predominantly relational and relied heavily on latent coding, therefore the interpretations being drawn are our own, replete with our values and experiences. While this is not a limitation of qualitative research, we cannot say with certainty how the contents of the documents are being consumed by high school students or integrated into their knowledge of the ECEC field. To remedy this, future research could investigate how high school students in Ontario feel about the field of ECEC as a result of exposure in these courses.

Conclusion

Our findings contribute to existing research on professional recognition in ECEC by analyzing a previously un-researched source of discourse that circulates in our society, thereby adding a unique voice and perspective. After having completed this research, we both feel more resolute in our wish to challenge public discourse about the field of ECEC.

Some might argue that secondary school curriculum documents are an insignificant contributor to this larger conversation about professional recognition in ECEC. We wholeheartedly disagree: “Professionalizing early childhood education requires a consistent and unambiguous point of view about the purpose of its work, and about what defines its shared identity and responsibility” (Washington, 2017, p. 2). No matter the audience, we argue that the messaging about the ECEC field should consistently elevate it. Messaging, when effective, describes the complexities, challenges, and inherent value of a career in early learning. The benefits of professionalization extend to children, their families, educators, and society at large (Washington, 2017). The discourse evident in high school course material undermines the work and professional status of educators and continues to be used to justify the inequitable way ECEs are compensated for their work. Current discourses, such as those presented within these high school documents, make it both easy and acceptable to undervalue the field of ECEC.
References


The (Not) Good Educator: Reconceptualizing the Image of the Educator

Lisa Johnston

Abstract

This article tells the story of an early childhood educator caught with an incomplete program plan during a Ministry inspection. The author situates the story within the grand narratives of neoliberalism and developmentalism. Then using reconceptualist theories, she deconstructs the discourse of the good educator and reconstructs a new subjectivity as an intentional (not) good educator. The author further discovers the discourse of the (not) good educator within How Does Learning Happen?’s positioning of the educator as a researcher with an invitation to challenge the status quo. The article ends with a retelling of the original story from a transformed perspective.

Key words

Early childhood educator, program planning, neoliberalism, developmentalism, How Does Learning Happen?

Author Biography

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Questioning the Good Educator

What would you say if I told you that once, as an ECE, I was caught by a Ministry of Education licensing inspector with an incomplete program plan? Would you hail me as a hero because I chose to spend my time with children rather than paperwork or would you scold me for not being a good educator who had all her paperwork done? In 2018, I went back to school to get a master’s degree in early childhood studies. It was an amazing year and one that I recognize as an enormous privilege. I did not take this opportunity lightly, which is why I wrote this article. I had the opportunity to reflect on the incident of being caught with an incomplete program plan through a whole new perspective, and I have been changed as an educator. Throughout this one-year journey I was able to deconstruct the image I had been given of a good educator. Subsequently I have also been able to reconstruct a new image of myself as a (not) good educator. The question, “What am I willing to risk?” was a constant in this journey. In sharing this story, I am risking vulnerability in implicating myself and exposing my work experiences. I share this not to point fingers but to uncover how these experiences are entangled within larger stories of neoliberalism and developmentalism and to identify spaces for transformation. In this article, I share the circumstances of my story of being caught without my program plan done and invite you on my journey of deconstructing and then reconstructing this narrative using reconceptualist theories and scholars. For those who are new to the reconceptualizing ECE movement, I begin with a brief introduction and an orientation to the stories of neoliberalism and developmentalism.

Noticing Developmentalism

In the early 1990s, a group of psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists began to critique the dominance of developmental psychology in their respective fields of study and specifically in early childhood education (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2018). Their critiques exposed the limitations of developmental theories as predicated on white, middle class, normative, scientific standards of development. Though developmental theories claim to be neutral and objective, since they are based on Western scientific principles of objective observation and testing, they are in fact very biased (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2006), favouring the type of people who created the standards and othering those that do not meet them (Bernhard, 2002; Burman, 1994; Walkerdine, 1988). Reconceptualist scholars critique the way that developmental theories, like Western science, categorize and separate aspects of human development and identify predetermined outcomes for development at certain ages (Cannella, 1997). They take issue with the way that developmental theory has become a dominant discourse in early childhood education, cast as the one and only story of human development (Moss, 2015). Reconceptualist scholars take the point of view that there is no true objective and neutral knowledge; that the definitions of knowledge and education are subjective, partial, provisional, political, and should constantly be challenged and questioned (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015; Moss, 2019). Instead, these scholars explore early childhood education with
other theories that tell other stories, for example, feminist theories, queer theory, postmodern and poststructural theories, critical race theory, post-colonialism, and posthumanism, to name a few (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2006).

Learning about this critique of developmentalism caused me to reflect on my education and career and to notice the obvious and more covert workings of developmentalism. As well as being trained exclusively in developmental theory, as many of us are, the Early Learning for Every Child Today or ELECT framework (Best Start Expert Panel on the Early Years, 2007), which is still used to guide many programs, includes the Continuum of Development, grounding it firmly in developmental theory. The framework also reflects the scientific nature of developmentalism in the way it positions educators as experts, with expert knowledge and skills that are applied to children universally. Developmentalism can also be seen in tools that are intended to measure quality. These tools determine quality through narrow definitions based on, for example, counting how many books and materials a program has, implying that there is a certain number that meets a quality standard and where less than that implies a lower quality program. These narrow definitions of quality have been and continue to be contested (for more information, see Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2006).

Noticing Neoliberalism

Moss (2019) refers to the big stories of early childhood education as grand narratives. Foucault (1980), a poststructural philosopher, would refer to these narratives as “regimes of truth” (p. 131). The story of developmentalism is embedded in another grand narrative called neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is the current political ideology in much of the English-speaking world (Moss, 2019). It is the most recent iteration of capitalism that functions on the free-market system. Unlike our public education system, early childhood education in Canada functions in this free-market system (Halfon & Langford, 2015). During the inception of the welfare state in Canada, the government took a larger role in providing services and financial support for health care, education, seniors, children and families, the unemployed, and low-income earners. As support for expanding services waned, the neoliberal market system began to take over (Davies & Bansel, 2007). This system operates with little government accountability or oversight, instead relying on the competition of the market to regulate itself (Davies & Bansel, 2007). However, since the market system values ideals, originally classed as masculine, such as high profits, competition, and individuality, early childhood educators, who are predominately women, are particularly oppressed by this system (Osgood, 2006). Care work does not necessarily fit into the “rigid production schedules” (Wein, 1996) of neoliberal markets where educators are expected to do more in less time and are held personally accountable for not meeting expectations (Osgood, 2006; Tronto, 2003). Furthermore, educators’ wages and working conditions are determined by what the market can bear (Halfon & Langford, 2015). With limited government funding for subsidies, the majority of parent fees, which are already extremely high,
go toward educators’ salaries. This effectively keeps educators’ wages low and does not allow for improved working conditions for ECEs, such as paid planning time, which is a critical piece to my own story.

The Context

My story takes place against the backdrop of the recent professionalization of the early childhood sector in Ontario from 2007 until the present day. I have been an early childhood educator (ECE) in Toronto since 2002. During this time I have experienced the introduction of the first framework for early childhood education in Ontario, *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT) (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Years, 2007); the creation of the College of ECE (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007); the move of the early childhood sector to the Ministry of Education in 2010; the replacement of the *Day Nurseries Act* (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1997) with the *Child Care and Early Years Act* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a); the introduction of *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years (HDLH)* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b); and, in the City of Toronto, the transition from the Metro Operating Criteria, which was a set of standards set by the City for centres with subsidized childcare spaces and monitored annually by city consultants, to the *Assessment for Quality Improvement Rating Scale* or *AQI* (City of Toronto, 2019), a rating scale that is published on the City’s website and enforced annually by quality assurance analysts.

All these changes to implement professionalization have brought increased regulations and expectations for early childhood educators. However, the support and resources for educators to meet the growing demands of professionalization have remained stagnant, creating what the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) refers to as “a professionalization gap” (AECEO, n.d.). The AECEO’s Professional Pay and Decent Work Campaign is aimed at closing the professionalization gap (AECEO, n.d.). The campaign specifically recognizes paid planning time as an essential ingredient of decent work and part of the successful implementation of *HDLH* (AECEO, 2016; 2017). My story centres around my experience with a lack of paid planning time and its entanglement with the image I had of myself as an educator.

The first centre where I worked as an ECE had a system, worked out among the staff, for program planning. Two days a week, the staff in the toddler and preschool rooms would take early lunches. On one of those days, the toddler staff would support the preschool room to leave the program for an hour to plan and, on the other day, we would switch. When I moved to a new centre a few years later, I tried to establish a similar routine, but my attempts were unsuccessful. It wasn’t feasible to take early lunches at the new centre. It somehow seemed more disruptive to the routines in each room. So, we were left to find other ways to get our weekly program plan done. We tried to do it during the children’s rest time, but we were often trying to balance other responsibilities during that time, most importantly supporting the children to either fall asleep or to rest quietly. The documentation of
children’s learning and development also needed to get done and competed for this time slot. What often happened was that my room partner and I would take turns writing the plan at home, based on brief conversations in the room about some of our ideas or observations of children’s play and interests that we had frantically written down in a notebook. Everything continuously felt rushed, like we were always behind, like there was never enough time. It was exhausting. Our program planning (and documentation) became more about meeting the expectations than it was about the liveliness of what was happening in the program with the children. This is where my story begins…

Original Narrative

I remember that day like it was yesterday—the day the Ministry of Education licensing inspector came to inspect our centre and we didn’t have our program plan done. It was summer. My educator partner and I were having a wonderfully busy time with the children, going on trips and community walks and having special guests visiting our centre. We were also tending our playground garden and watching the life cycle of the ladybugs in our maple trees. When we looked closely, we could see how the ladybugs were eating the aphids that had made themselves comfortable on some of our garden plants. We had been building stronger relationships with the families as well, as members had been able to come along on some of our field trips. While we put a lot of effort into planning our summer program, we hadn’t had a chance to get to our weekly program plan. In fact, in the previous couple of weeks, we had started to write them but did not have enough time to complete them. Thinking back now, perhaps I didn’t complete the program as a silent and passive rebellion against the lack of time for planning and perhaps it was due to exhaustion from constantly fighting against/for time. Regardless, that ball was dropping and I was letting it fall.

It wasn’t that we weren’t engaged in meaningful experiences with the children and in our community. It just wasn’t written down. For instance, the day before the fateful inspection, on my way to work, I cycled through a local park and saw some city workers/arborists cutting down a very large, old tree. I thought about what a great field trip opportunity this might be for the children. I cycled faster to get to the centre and suggested an impromptu trip to the park to watch the unique event. My educator partner and I helped the preschool children get ready, and we headed out. When we got there, the workers were trying to get the very big tree stump out of the ground. They had wrapped chains around it and were making notches in it with their chainsaws to provide the chain with something to grab. The children watched closely and asked questions about why the workers were cutting down the tree. It took the arborists many attempts until they were finally able to pull out the tree stump. As the tree stump came out, a family of rats came scurrying out from the big hole in the middle of the tree stump. One of the workers picked up a rat by the tail and held it up for a moment and then let it go. It scurried away, thankfully in the opposite direction. It was fascinating to see how quickly the rats disappeared. The children had many more questions and thoughts that we spent discussing during the rest of the day at the centre.
We were having such a great time that I was caught off-guard when the Ministry of Education inspector came to inspect our centre and renew our license. Of course, we were written up for having an incomplete program plan. I immediately felt ashamed, embarrassed, and implicated. The silent rebellion I had felt quickly faded. I tried feebly to stand up for myself and my room partner, saying that we had been so busy and with no planning time it was almost impossible to get done. But there was no excuse for it not being done. I was responsible. I felt like I had let down my partner, my centre, and my organization. I felt like a failure and definitely not a good educator. I carried the shame of it with me for a long time after.

Deconstructing the Good Educator

Deconstructing this narrative means noticing the doctrines of developmentalism and neoliberalism at work in it, how they were shaping who I was as an educator and how their influences told me I was not a good educator. Cannella (1997) warned of the increase in regulations that professionalizing early childhood education brings (p. 138). Neoliberalism is evident in my narrative in the increased intensity of the expectations and rules for having the paperwork done, in the surveillance of ensuring that expectations are met, in the lack of time provided to meet the expectations, and in the fault being placed squarely on me for not having my work done. I also took up this neoliberal narrative and heaped blame on myself. I was conditioned to think that if I didn't meet expectations, I alone was the one to blame, not the system for failing to provide time for me to meet the expectations.

Developmentalism is also at work behind the scenes in this story, in the expectations that the program plan would include developmental domains and skills within the designated activities to demonstrate support for skill development. As I had not completed the program plan, I was also not demonstrating my expert skill and knowledge as an educator. The relationships, the experiences, and the conversations that I was actively engaged in were not valid or counted because they were not written down, not scientifically linked to developmental theory. A study by Langford (2007) confirms that there is an assumptive connection between knowing and practicing developmental theory and being considered a good educator.

The image of the good educator is shaped by neoliberalism and developmentalism in a particular way. Moss (2006) identifies the good educator within a neoliberal system as a technician. The educator-as-technician is part of the childcare industry that is governed by a set of universal, standard requirements for quality, and each educator must demonstrate proficiency in skills and knowledge in order to meet these standards. The work of the educator-as-technician is reduced to checklists, predetermined developmental outcomes, and curriculum that is not necessarily responsive to specific local contexts. In my story, I had sidestepped the image of educator-as-technician in favour of spending time with the children and families. In a neoliberal context then, this makes me not a good educator.
Smith and Campbell (2018) recount an eerily similar policy and practice context in Australia in which they intentionally resist the expectations of the quality assurance measure in favour of more democratic ways of documenting learning. They are literally telling my story, as they describe the image of “good educator” (p. 316). In my narrative, I am struggling with the work of the program plan much like the educators in Smith and Campbell’s (2018) chapter who are struggling with working on children’s portfolios as part of their quality requirements.

Portfolios were both a family keepsake but also evidence of the “good educator.” Good educators were constituted within this circulating discourse as experts who had special insights into the true picture of who each child was, the child’s interests, his or her development, friendships and so on (p. 316).

In fact, I also struggled with time for documentation as planning and documentation go hand-in-hand. Smith and Campbell (2018) go on to point out that, “Although many educators spoke privately about how the time spent on portfolios diminished their pleasure in their work, few risked their status or institutional authorization as a good educator by opting out of these practices” (p. 316).

In general, I was this educator—a supposedly “good” educator because I was good at following checklists, creating prescribed documentation, and making sure that my room and program plan met all the requirements handed down from powers above. That is, until I failed to complete my program plan, and then I was not a good educator anymore.

What was different that summer? I think, subconsciously, I was tired of this false image, tired of not having enough time while simultaneously I was enjoying the time I was spending with the children and families. I was not worrying so much about the program plan because I knew that we were having rich experiences together as a community. I was rejuvenated, excited, and feeling spontaneous and lively. Perhaps it was this sense of rejuvenation that was fueling my short-lived rebellion. Silin (2018) discusses how reinstating pleasure was a big part of the work of early reconceptualists.

Desire makes us, child and adult, vulnerable. It is a potential source of danger as well as pleasure, risk as well as reward. Educators who encouraged children to strike out in new directions in order to learn and grow wanted no less for themselves. (p. 62)

Somewhere inside of me, by intentionally being a (not) good educator, I was willing to risk my status for pleasure in my work. Until I was caught, that is. Still, I think this is where I was at for a brief moment that summer. The summer that I was not a good educator.

Reconstructing the (Not) Good Educator

Who is the (not) good educator then? For me, the (not) good educator is one who resists the dominant discourses of developmentalism and neoliberalism that shape their identity as a technician. They are not good because they are not willing to conform to the expectations of these systems and
discourses. In choosing to resist they are intentionally choosing to be (not) good and by taking an ethical and political stand against these discourses they are redefining what *good* means and who a good educator is.

Smith and Campbell (2018) do this by intentionally reinterpreting the expectations in their framework and creating documentation that is unconventional and resists normative expectations yet still adheres to the spirit of the framework. Instead of creating individual portfolios, they started to use a single collective journal that all the educators and families used to document what was happening in the classroom but to also explore questions, passions, and interests (p. 317). This was a messier way of documenting what was happening, but it also gave room for educators to notice and think about how racism, classism, and sexism were at work in their programs (p. 316). The creation of the single journal was also part of an intentional shift back to spending more time with children and families because they were no longer spending all their time on the portfolios (p. 317).

Smith and Campbell (2018) talk about having points of resistance (p. 317). Their curriculum document, *Early Years Learning Framework: Belonging, Being, Becoming* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), which is similar to our *How Does Learning Happen?* pedagogical document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b), has a focus on critical reflection. They identified this as a point of resistance that gave them an opening to engage in activism. They used this invitation to critical reflection to ask questions about what they understood about each child; what theories shaped their work, and who was advantaged or disadvantaged by working from certain theories (p. 317). They understood this as resisting neoliberalism and knew that it would be challenged by government inspectors. Unlike my story of resisting, Smith and Campbell (2018) were prepared for the challenge. They were not as concerned about a low score and in fact, expected it. They responded by continuing to reflect and question how neoliberalism was at work during the inspection.

The (not) good educator is also not alone but works collectively with others in resisting. I loved reading Smith and Campbell’s (2018) story of resistance. I only wished that I had read it sooner. However, one thing that I take away from their account for the future is the importance of working collectively. Smith and Campbell (2018) resisted neoliberalism’s insistence on individuality by resisting collectively. They talk about having a sense of “collective uncertainty” about what they were doing (p. 317). This conjures up for me a sense of excitement of the unknown. As well as resisting collectively, they practiced collectivity by creating the single journal to document the happenings in the classrooms. In this way, they made themselves, the children, and the families all part of the same evolving and collective story as opposed to creating individual portfolios. The single journal is a resistance of developmentalism’s focus on categorizing and individualizing and is an opportunity to explore other theories and questions that are normally silenced by developmental theories. In my story, I see now how I had been fully individualized by neoliberalism. I was alone in my resistance and unable to withstand the pressure of the disciplinary power. I also didn’t have any alternative theories to think with.
By *thinking with*, I mean that educators read and learn about ideas and theories other than developmentalism and then use these ideas to critically reflect on their practice. I already think with developmentalism all the time. It has become an invisible part of who I am as an educator. However, now that I see it and can name it, I can notice it and resist it more easily. As MacNaughton (2005) states, “Discovering ideologies—uncovering the invisible—is the first step to challenging them and the oppressive and unjust power relations they hide and support” (p. 8). I am frustrated by the fact that I was not exposed to other theories and perspectives in my education, that I was not actively engaged in critical reflection. Now that I have read a little more, I have other authors to think with aside from developmental theorists. This has helped me see what has been silenced by developmentalism—for example, racism, classism and sexism—and how thinking with other authors and ideas can change my practice.

One of the theoretical perspectives that I have been exploring and thinking with is poststructuralism (Foucault, 1979; 1980) and feminist poststructuralism (St. Pierre, 2000) because both are very useful in critiquing dominant discourses and exposing both power structures and avenues of resistance. Smith and Campbell (2018) draw on poststructural theory (Foucault, 1979) to examine how disciplinary power in the form of public rating systems and inspections oppresses female educators. This power has the effect of creating what Foucault (1979) refers to as “docile bodies” (p. 136) who do not challenge the status quo and who are subjected to “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) such as developmentalism and neoliberalism that establish discourses about who they are as good educators. This and other theories create alternative narratives that challenge the status quo and ask educators to think in different ways about how they can live well with others. These theories also help reframe the seemingly neutral and innocent profession of early childhood education as a political educational project and ask educators to make ethical and political decisions about their practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

The image of the educator that I am reconstructing through an examination of Smith and Campbell’s (2018) example and comparing to my own story, is vastly different from the one shaped by developmentalism and neoliberalism. No longer a technician, Moss (2006) describes this educator as a researcher. He argues that the image of the educator as researcher implies a disposition toward learning, seeking new understandings of children and their learning processes, and toward listening and being in relationship and dialogue with others. It is also a disposition that embraces uncertainty, like Smith and Campbell’s (2018) “collective uncertainty” and sees research as not only for scientists in labs but for educators and children to engage in together. In contrast to the educator as the expert, Moss (2006), drawing on Rinaldi, identifies the importance of uncertainty as essential in the disposition of the educator as researcher.

[Uncertainty is a] quality that you can offer, not only a limitation. And that is very problematic in a culture in which there is punishment when you have a crisis, when you have doubts, and when you make a mistake. You have to really change your being, to recognise doubt and uncertainty,
to recognise your limits as a resource, as a place of encounter, as a quality. Which means that you accept that you are unfinished, in a state of permanent change, and your identity is in the dialogue. (Rinaldi as cited in Moss, 2006, p. 36–37)

What was really exciting for me was to realize, with new insight, that *HDLH* positions educators in Ontario as researchers. I had probably read that before but did not have a deep enough understanding of the intention behind it. Furthermore, *HDLH* positions educators as critically reflective and engaged in collaborative inquiry. I had learned and lived being a reflective practitioner, according to *ELECT*, which meant being reflective of my own practice and curriculum. I had taken up the same interpretation of a critically reflective practitioner in *HDLH*. However, now I understand that to critically reflect means to also challenge and question the systems in which I live and work and the theories that I work from. In fact, I came across the following quote in *HDLH*. "Thoughtful questioning and challenging of the status quo on an ongoing basis can help transform programs and bring out the best in children, families, and educators" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). This shook me. Right there in plain English, a government document was giving early childhood educators the green light, indeed a mandate, to question and challenge the status quo. Finally, *HDLH* stands in opposition to neoliberalism in its positioning of educators engaged in collaborative inquiry. To me, this means working collectively, not individually. I have rediscovered *HDLH* as a tool of resistance that helps me to reconstruct an image of myself as a (not) good educator.

Another tool that *HDLH* offers the educator as researcher, and which I had not fully grasped until now, is the concept of pedagogical documentation. I had taken up pedagogical documentation in the same way I had taken up critical reflection, as just a fancier way of saying the same thing. However, pedagogical documentation, like the rest of *HDLH*, resists neoliberal and developmental interpretations.

Pedagogical documentation is about more than recording events—it is a means to learning about how children think and learn. It offers a process to explore all of our questions about children. As suggested by Carlina Rinaldi, it is a way of listening to children, helping us to learn about children during the course of their experiences and to make this learning visible to others for interpretation. And, it encourages educators to be co-learners alongside both children and their families. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b, p. 21)

Dahlberg and Moss (2018) discuss the use of pedagogical documentation as a “language of evaluation” (p. 100). Coming out of the educational philosophies and practices of Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012), pedagogical documentation is not prescriptive and there are no steps to follow, rather it is a mindset, a disposition, an ethical and political practice. Smith and Campbell’s (2018) collective journal is a good example of pedagogical documentation. It is messy, and it will look different in different early childhood education programs with different people. It is not easily measured or compatible with rating scales. However, it is not an “anything goes” form of documentation. Dahlberg
and Moss (2018) offer four principles that underpin pedagogical documentation “as a practice for assessing and evaluating processes of democracy; as a practice for assessing and evaluating learning processes; as a practice for evaluating discourses and challenging dominant discourses; and as a practice for evaluating the vitality and intensity in the event” (pp. 103–107). These principles transcend times and places and can be activated in any program. I wonder how different my narrative of not completing my program plan would have been if I had known then what I know now....

Reimagining the Narrative

I was working as an RECE in a childcare centre with preschool children. The educators in our centre had been thinking with the ideas and practices of pedagogical documentation as described in *How Does Learning Happen?* and were wanting to do something different. Through an introduction to some reconceptualist authors like Moss (2006) and MacNaughton (2003, 2005), we had been coming to understand ourselves as situated within neoliberalism, and we wanted to find a way to resist. In doing a close reading together of *How Does Learning Happen?*, we found an intriguing quote that literally invited us to question and challenge the status quo. Here was our opportunity to take a stand. We no longer wanted to be docile bodies or good educators. We were going to be (not) good educators.

Using pedagogical documentation was a way that we could do this while also engaging in rich, meaningful curriculum-making with children, families, and each other. This meant that we made a conscious choice to not use our traditional program plan with developmental domains and skills as our method for planning and documenting what was happening in our program. Instead, we made space in our program for ongoing documentation of our experiences that included drawings, notes, questions, photographs, and other documentation. We invited families and children in the centre to engage with our documentation and to add to it. It wasn't the quick-and-easy, neatly packaged documentation that we were used to, and we couldn't necessarily share it electronically. It was messy and ongoing, full of questions, wonderings, and thinking. We also had the support of our supervisor, who, knowing that we were doing good work, told us that she had confidence in our professional judgement.

This summer was a very different summer. We were busy going on trips and community walks and having special guests visit our centre. We had been tending our playground garden and watching the life cycle of the ladybugs in our maple trees. When we looked closely, we saw how the ladybugs and the ladybug larvae were eating the aphids that had made themselves comfortable on some of our garden plants. We took pictures and discussed what was happening. Some children thought we should get rid of the aphids because they seemed to be bothering our plants, but others didn’t want to because then the ladybugs wouldn’t have any food. We were documenting the children’s questions about this process and pondering deep questions about why we considered some insects as good
and others as bad. We were also creating stronger relationships with the families as they were now very active in our program in a new way. They were coming on our field trips but were also engaged in our work in the garden and in our thinking about insects and in our pedagogical documentation. We were starting to see how pedagogical documentation was revealing children’s learning processes and by including everyone, it became a very democratic practice. We were no longer the experts but were learning and researching alongside children and families.

We were also intensely involved in the events that were happening in our local community. One day city arborists were pruning the trees near our playground using a cherry picker. The children were asking lots of questions about what they were doing and why. The arborists were very kind to take a break and answer some of our questions. After that, we were writing stories and drawing pictures of the trees and discussing why the arborists were cutting some of the tree branches down, how that makes us feel, and what will happen to the trees and the animals that lived in them. The work was posted with narrative to accompany the drawings and photographs and questions that we wanted to continue to explore. Other children, educators, and families were invited to see what we were working on and to contribute to the questions and wonderings.

Later that week, as I was cycling to the centre through a local park, I saw city workers cutting down a large, old tree. I thought about how the children in our program would be interested in witnessing this event. When I arrived at the centre and told everyone what was happening in the park, they were very excited. We quickly prepared to go and soon were on our way. By the time we arrived, the city workers were trying to pull the tree stump out using a large chain attached to a backhoe. They were using chainsaws to cut notches in the tree stump so that the chain wouldn't slip. The chainsaws made a lot of noise. Finally, after many attempts, the tree stump started to move and lift out of the ground.

Surprisingly, as the tree stump lifted up, a family of rats scurried out and ran away. One of the city workers picked up a rat by the tail and held it up for a moment before letting it go. It scurried after the others. (Thankfully not in our direction). When the rats ran out, my educator partner screamed and we both laughed. The children shouted excitedly and pointed at them. We carried the liveliness of the experience back to the centre to discuss the event and how the tree was a home for the rats. The children were very curious about this and had lots of questions about the rats and where they went. They also had their own stories about encounters with rats that they shared. And so, we continued our inquiry and pedagogical documentation with trees and now rats.

The next day the Ministry of Education inspector arrived to conduct the yearly inspection of the centre and renew our license. As expected, we are written up for not having our program plan done. We showed the inspector our pedagogical documentation that captured the vitality and intensity of the events we had been experiencing and revealed the democratic processes of sharing and co-constructing knowledge with the children and families; the learning processes of the children; the
thinking, wondering, and questioning of why trees need to be cut down and what happens to habitats for animals. While the inspector was intrigued and engaged in thinking with us about our documentation, we still received a non-compliance for an incomplete program plan. This time, however, I/we did not feel like failures. This time I/we was/were not ashamed. We knew that the work in our classroom was rich and meaningful and responsive to our experiences. We knew that we were acting as ethical educators. This time we knew we had taken a stand and challenged the status quo.

Concluding with Hope

Throughout my journey of deconstructing an image of myself as not a good educator and reconstructing myself as a (not) good educator, I have repeatedly come across messages of hope within resistance. Hope comes up time and time again in contrast to the bleak realities of developmentalism, neoliberalism, and the image of the good educator as a technician. Iorio, Parnell, Quintero, & Hamm (2018) suggest engaging in the “practice of hope” (p. 300). “This understanding of hope presents the possibility hope as anti-storying of neoliberalism—a way to see what could be possible” (p. 300). Continuing to reproduce the logics of neoliberalism is futile and hopeless. Moss (2010) would argue that it is unsustainable.

Hope is taking a stand. Hope is working collectively. Hope is thinking with new theories. Hope is having alternative narratives (Moss, 2019). Hope is responding to the vitality of the moment (Dahlberg & Moss, 2018). Hope is resistance. Hope is the (not) good educator.

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