

Professional Learning Position / Outdoor Nature-Based Learning



Summer 2014

*It's **Not**
Early Childhood Education
without the
Early Childhood Educator*

ECs have specialized knowledge of child development and curriculum in the early years.
They set up rich early learning environments that are inquiry- and play-based.
Without early childhood educators, it isn't early childhood education.



Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario
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RENEWAL TIME?



DON'T FORGET TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

As a member of the AECEO you are part of a community that takes the ECE profession to the next level. Being a member is the best way to stay involved and connect with others who share your passion.

Renewing your membership helps to ensure that we are able to continue to promote the profession, keep you informed, support your professional growth and advocate on your behalf.

Simply put, belonging to your professional association makes good professional sense.

Keep Informed, Stay Connected!

As the professional association for ECEs in Ontario, the AECEO provides members with vital, up-to-date information about early learning and care.

Keep informed and stay connected by notifying us of changes to your contact information, particularly your email address. Please contact membership@aeceo.ca to confirm or update your current contact information.

WE OFFER SEVERAL WAYS FOR YOU TO STAY INFORMED:



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COVER:

AECEO poster to promote the value of Early Childhood Educators - developed as part of a project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

ABOVE PHOTO:

Emma meets a chicken at WindReach Farm.

THE AECEO WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE & THANK THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:
Marlene Hamill, Diane Kashin, Barbara McKee, Sinéad Rafferty, WindReach Farm

AECEO Position Paper on Professional Learning for RECEs

In continuing its mission to support Registered Early Childhood Educators, the AECEO researched and developed a discussion paper on professional learning for RECEs. The purpose of the discussion paper was to initiate dialogue about what makes professional learning opportunities of the highest quality. AECEO members and the wider early childhood education and care community responded to the discussion paper and this feedback was incorporated into our Professional Learning Position Paper.

A provincial policy forum targeting funders and providers of professional learning opportunities for RECEs is currently in the planning stages for late Fall 2014. The goal of the forum is to facilitate a coordinated approach in the delivery of professional development in Ontario.

Position Paper: Professional Learning for Registered Early Childhood Educators

Introduction

For over 60 years, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) has provided professional growth opportunities to early childhood educators in this province. As an organization the AECEO has made significant contributions in the areas of training, public awareness, certification, equivalency, networking, professional development and recognition for the profession.

In 1989, the AECEO spearheaded the establishment of a Legislative Recognition Committee to advocate for the implementation of a professional regulatory body for ECE professionals in Ontario. Almost 20 years later, and as a result of the commitment and dedication of countless AECEO member volunteers, the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007, was finally enacted and the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) established. Since the inception of the ECE Act, the AECEO has continued to support registered early childhood educators in navigating and transitioning within the changing landscape of the profession. Working alongside sector stakeholders, the AECEO has helped to shape the new and evolving vision for the sector.

In continuing its mission to support registered early childhood educators, the AECEO has developed this position paper on professional learning. The purpose of the paper is to present the AECEO's position on what makes professional learning opportunities of the highest quality.

Current landscape

A significant number of registered early childhood educators already regard professional learning as a vital part of their professional practice. The "You Bet We Still Care Study" reported that the majority of early childhood program staff respondents participated in some form of professional learning within a one year period (Flanagan, Beach & Varmuza, 2013). The main reason cited was the need to keep current in their field.

Since 2006, Ontario's early learning curriculum framework has guided early childhood professional practice. The framework is designed to stimulate on-going discussion amongst registered early childhood educators regarding their values, theories, and beliefs about early learning and care and to provide these professionals with the pedagogical tools for rich early learning environments which reflect the framework's vision and principles (Langford, 2012).

In the Ministry of Education's *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario Discussion Paper* (2012) the government states that one of its objectives is "to develop tools, resources and training opportunities to support child care operators and caregivers as they implement...quality initiatives" (p. 10). More recently, the province's *Early Years Policy Framework* (2013) states in the context of their guiding principle on high quality programs and services that "early years professionals must be knowledgeable, responsive, and reflective, and continuous professional learning opportunities should be encouraged" (p.7).

The College of ECE is currently undergoing a process to develop a continuous professional learning program to document its members' accountability and adherence to the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice mandated for the profession. As stated in their consultation paper, "Continuous Professional Learning Program Development Process":

As a regulatory body, the College must transform the concept of professional learning from something that members of the profession "just did" into an institutionalized construct with specified requirements of members. The continuous professional learning construct will include expectations for members outlined in government legislation and College by-laws, policies, practices, programs and compliance mechanisms (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2013, p. 2).

The current CECE program proposes a means by which members can document their professional learning using a self assessment and reflective model that reviews a member's "recent professional learning activities, performance reviews, changes in relevant legislation, policy and procedures or other information relevant to ... (an individual's) continuous professional learning" (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2013, p.6).

However, "professional learning activities" are not defined by the CECE in the above mentioned document. Currently, professional learning activities accessed by registered early childhood educators range from single or multi-session workshops to educational and professional credentials such as certificates, diplomas and degrees. Professional learning activities are currently being delivered by a host of various organizations and institutions in the province, including, but not limited to, the AECEO, OCAAT Colleges, Universities, unions, and large multi-service employers. The wide array of activities, deliverers and formats presently available, creates a need to establish clear criteria to help identify professional learning opportunities of the highest quality.

I: Professional development vs. Professional learning

Traditionally, the term "professional development" has been seen as a one-time or "one-day-one-stop" only activity, that is, workshops and conferences in which the participant is a passive consumer of information. Loughran (2010) states that:

traditional professional development is often linked to the implementation of some form of educational change by doing something to teachers, that is, telling us about the change and expecting it to then be carried out. In this way mandated changes are presented, we are trained in those changes in terms of technical requirements (sometimes as simple as re-labeling existing curriculum and practice) and then we are expected to implement those changes (p. 200).

In contrast, Loughran (2010) maintains that professional learning "carries an expectation that we are able to bring our expert judgement to bear on how change might best be implemented in our own context and practice" (p.201). "Professional learning" is then viewed as a range of on-going activities in which early childhood educators are actively engaged in the processes of assessing and reflecting on their own learning and practice. In this model, learning becomes a back and forth interaction between practicing and thinking about practice that is supported by multiple stakeholders across the different stages of a professional's career (Urban, 2008).

The College of ECE is proposing a continuous professional learning (CPL) framework for RECEs to adhere to as part of their renewal of membership criteria.

II: Guiding Principles

The College of ECE has a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice document to which all its members must adhere. The CPL as proposed is a tool in which its members are to reflect and document their professional learning. It does not outline accepted principles for professional learning to guide delivery or identify accepted institutions that will deliver it. The open-

ended nature of this tool makes it imperative that guiding principles be established to ensure that the professional learning opportunities accessed by the individual RECE will allow her/him to successfully meet the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the profession.

III: Coordination of Services

The current fragmented delivery of professional learning by various stakeholders catering to the different stages of a professional career makes it difficult for individual registered early childhood educators to navigate and find professional learning of the highest quality.

IV: Wages and working conditions

The willingness of registered early childhood educators to keep abreast of their profession or the importance of on-going professional learning is not in question. However, according to the “You Bet We Still Care” study, hourly wages of program staff in all provinces and territories from 1998 to 2012 increased by 5-50%, with the exception of Ontario as the only province in which hourly wages decreased (Flanagan, Beach & Varmuza, 2013). The study also reports that in 2012 fewer staff reported access to paid preparation time, financial assistance and paid release time for ECE-related professional learning than in 1998.

The increasing demands of the profession in the past decade are incongruent with the financial compensation and working conditions faced by registered early childhood educators.

AECEO Position:

I: On Professional Learning vs. Professional Development:

The AECEO supports the use of the term, “professional learning”, rather than “professional development” because of the implications of life-long learning, self-reflection and active engagement on the member’s professional growth (Edwards & Nutall, 2009). It also implicitly denotes an understanding of oneself, and encourages interaction and reflection with others (peers, leaders, families, public), which promotes professional growth and learning.

II: On Guiding Principles

The AECEO believes that professional learning for registered early childhood educators should be guided by the following principles:

- Supports active participation
- Critically identifies, evaluates and challenges thinking about daily practice
- Poses questions about values and beliefs regarding why we do what we do and what we want for children, families, communities and society
- Introduces new and relevant ideas and topics
- Creates and supports a critically reflective community of practice that reciprocally interacts with the changing needs of children, families and society
- Promotes a sense of professionalism
- Easily accessible and affordable
- Delivered using a broad range of informal and formal strategies or activities
- Delivered using a range of formats including face-to-face, hybrid (combination of face-to-face and on-line), and on-line

- Promotes collaboration between all professionals who work in different early childhood education and care settings (i.e. child care, full day kindergarten, family support programs)
- Engages participants in reflection regarding their daily practice
- Provides diversity to be inclusive of all areas of RECE employment
- Supports participant choice with respect to timing, topic and mode of delivery

III: On Coordination of Services

AECEO recommends a coordinated effort by all providers to enhance the content and delivery of professional learning activities. The AECEO will work with Professional Resource Centres in local communities and other professional learning providers across Ontario to build capacity and establish a clearinghouse of all professional learning activities that reflect the principles outlined above.

AECEO members can access this on-line clearinghouse to fulfill the CECE's program of "self-directed learning and personalized decision-making around enhancing their professional practice" (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2013, p.5).

The AECEO will also offer training in creating, building and updating a portfolio, which includes a self-assessment tool, professional learning plan and a record of programs, activities and/or strategies undertaken by the RECE. The College of ECE (2013) has identified portfolios as "a tool that assists members in being accountable for their own continuous professional learning" (p. 23).

For many years, the AECEO has provided a certification process and a significant number of AECEO members are currently certified. Moving forward, the AECEO will have a program in which members are assessed and certified through an e-portfolio.

IV: On Wages and Working Conditions

AECEO recommends that a professional learning framework be designed within a coherent early childhood human resources policy that provides sufficient funding and ensures adequate compensation and favourable working conditions to enhance the capacity of RECEs to undertake professional learning.

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AECEO recognized for contributions to the profession

Presented by *George Brown College, School of Early Childhood, and the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* at their 2014 Summer Institute, the award was given to the AECEO in recognition of the more than 60 years of work on behalf of ECEs. The award specifically acknowledged the advocacy for professional recognition and better working conditions that support healthy child development.

The AECEO's role as one of the crucial pillars in reinforcing the role of early childhood education as a public service was lauded by multiple speakers at this year's Summer Institute.

We would like to express our gratitude to *George Brown College, School of Early Childhood, and the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education* for this honour.

Pictured:

Patricia Chorney Rubin, Director, Community Services & Early Childhood, George Brown College

Eduarda Sousa, Executive Director, AECEO

Rachel Langford, AECEO President and Director, School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University



Barbara McKee RECE, AECEO.C

Teaching On the Other Side of the World

It was 40 degrees and the sweat kept running into my eyes as I tried to read the girls' workbooks. It was always a race trying to get to all the girls before chaos broke out and then on to the next subject! I wondered as I tried to catch my breath, "How did I ever get to this place?"

Actually, it had started on my first trip to this girls orphanage in 2003. I had gone for two weeks with a mission to paint the girls' rooms here on the other side of the world. We were in Tamil Nadu in the south of India in a place called Coimbatore. While we were at the orphanage, I discovered that there was a school for the girls with classes from kindergarten all the way up to grade 12. Of course I wanted to visit and see what this would be like. After visiting with the teachers and listening to their stories, it was clear to me that the teachers were very well qualified but they lacked the materials with which to teach. Classes consisted of a teacher demonstrating a concept on the chalk board and then asking the children to respond in their work books. The teachers were very eager to hear how we did things and also very interested in learning all that we could teach them and the children. I promised to come back to help in the school. I had returned in 2004, when another teacher and I did clinics for the teachers as well as purchasing much needed materials with the money we had raised in our churches back home. I was back in 2005. Then, in 2009, I came with a plan to stay for a year to teach kindergarten. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Being in India for two weeks did not prepare for being there for a year.

children had a parent or relative who was unable to keep the children with them. In some cases because they were very poor, or because they were being persecuted and were on the run, etc. Children would not be put up for adoption, but rather could live at the orphanage and get an education. As you can imagine, there were many issues for these girls; in some cases they had suffered trauma, others were not yet socialized as they had come from the jungle. Language was always an issue with India itself having over 40 languages. Because India is still very tribal, many of the girls did not get along with each other well. There were no special needs assessments of any kind either so that proved to be a problem as well.

For the most part, the girls were taught in English and were expected to speak English. It was thought that there would be less fighting if they all spoke the same language. I was surprised at how quickly they all learned the language.

Having 62 children in one class was overwhelming for me, but apparently not unusual there. The children all sat in desks and corporal punishment was a part of the system there. This meant



that the children in my class soon became very unruly as I wouldn't hit them. My goal was to teach them that they could have rewards once they met my expectations. All the children (even the very littlest ones) sat in desks from 8:30 to 12:30 and then from 1:30 to 4 p.m. There were also many community children who paid for their educations and came by bus. These children were also mostly Hindu. Because the school received money from the government the education was mostly secular.

Part of the issue for the girls in my class was my relationship with them. I lived in the same building with the orphan children and was Auntie Barbara outside of class but Madame in class. This was hard for them at first. I played games and sang with them only after they were dismissed from closing ceremonies at 4:00 pm. During class I was quite strict at first and tried to model the kind of tone and professional demeanor I saw in the other teachers. But the children often tested me. For each class I taught, (i.e., English, Science, Social Studies, and Math), I would demonstrate

In June of 2009, I retired from my position as Supervisor and Director of a centre in Guelph after twelve years with the organization. I gave away all of my stuff and off I went. The plan was to stay for a year and then come home to re-evaluate. School summer break was just ending as I arrived. After two weeks to acclimatize myself there, I was standing in front of my class of 62 children ages about 3 to 8 (some came without birth records). I was teaching a Senior Kindergarten curriculum that was based on the British system.

the concept on the board and teach by rote before they copied their work in pencil into their workbooks and I would go around to each student and mark their work. Then those books would be collected before moving on to the next subject.

Perhaps it would be helpful to explain the concept of this particular orphanage. It was a Christian orphanage and children came from all over India and surrounding countries including Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Some of them were orphans as we would know them, but in many cases the

Part of the issue for the girls in my class was my relationship with them. I lived in the same building with the orphan children and was Auntie Barbara outside of class but Madame in class.

The children all wanted my attention and they would deliberately break their pencils or lose their erasers to get it. They were constantly calling out to me, "Madame, I need you now" as I tried to make my way around the room. There were also fights breaking out at times and sometimes a child would be ill. I desperately worked to get them through two subjects so that I could reward them with stories or songs or art before the end of the morning or afternoon. I purchased hundreds of pencils and sharpened them all by hand at night. I purchased erasers as well, which went home in their pockets as often as not. I also began to introduce materials to teach with.

At first as I showed the children blocks or toys, I realized that although they could count one hundred by rote, they could not show me three blocks. Toys were completely new to them so they did not know how to play; they fought, grabbed and put things in their pockets. When the room got out of control, I would try to stay calm and just collect everything so they could not use them until I explained it all again. I also bought them books and art materials. Art and reading were also a part of the curriculum but until now they had no art materials and the only reading came out of a curriculum book that provided the material for all their subjects. The expectations for the children were very high. Their first examinations came in September, and yes they had to answer questions on paper in English for all of their subjects. They were also learning cursive writing and had to get the letters on the lines, neatly and clearly written. I had to write the exams and mark them as well as administering them in a culture where the children did not see themselves as individuals but rather as a community. They were constantly giving each other the answers and were supposed to be punished for this. I would do everything I could to separate them so that they could not see each other's work but it was an impossible task. I also tried to test them individually and orally so that I at least had

an understanding of who knew what, so that I could put their marks into report cards, and then meet with the parents of the children who came in from the community.

Teachers are regarded as much more important in this culture, then what I had been used to in Canada, and I was embarrassed by the way they often treated me. They gave gifts, apologized for their lack of English, and asked me how they should get their children to improve. One mother told me that her daughter rebuked her for her "low English" and told her she needed to speak English as Madame Barbara spoke it. Of course I told her that her English was wonderful.

Although I ended up getting sick and had to come home after six months, I learned a great deal from the girls, the parents, and the teachers while I was there. These people worked very hard under harsh conditions, they valued education and strived to be the absolute best they could be. There was a lot of illness to overcome, terrible skin diseases that were painful and contagious, tuberculosis, and fevers. The staff at the orphanage did their very best to love and care for the girls but there were few staff and 500 girls. The teachers were dedicated and although they were strict, they were also kind.

Before I left I gave my class a Teddy Bear Picnic. The girls loved to put their hair up with elastics, making pony tails on top of their heads, which they called a coconut tree. So that day, I put my hair up with my own very small coconut tree. The class erupted when I walked into the room, teachers there were not playful in this way and they loved it! We sang songs and had treats and I saw that my unruly and chaotic class had come together and learned to work by my "western ways." Most of them knew English well by now and were doing work at what would be considered grade 1 or 2 level here. They were writing, reading and doing



In the spirit of reflection, I am sure that they taught me far more than I taught them. My world has been expanded and I have gained appreciation for those brave people who leave all they know to come to Canada and build their lives again.

simple math. In science they had learned about living things, animals and their habitats, and common plants and how to care for them.

In the spirit of reflection, I am sure that they taught me far more than I taught them. Looking back on that time in India I realize that I have gained a much richer understanding of how children learn based on the schemas we provide, I also know how difficult it is to build knowledge when you do not understand the language and culture. My world has been expanded and I have gained appreciation for those brave people who leave all they know to come to Canada and build their lives again.



Barbara has worked as an Early Childhood Educator since 1986; she currently works at Conestoga College as the PD Coordinator for the Professional Resource Centre and is an Associate Faculty. She is the Sole Proprietor of Early Development Consulting. b.mckeeconsulting@gmail.com



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AECEO CERTIFICATION

A Journey Towards Personal and Professional Growth for RECEs

It has taken nearly two years to review and update our Certification Process. The significant changes that have happened in the early learning sector over the last 5 years made it necessary for us to take our time in order to ensure the new process is both comprehensive and provides RECEs with the necessary tools to engage in reflective practice. As part of the program's re-launch a new designation, **AECEO.C**, was announced as the credential to replace ECE.C. The new acronym more accurately captures the ownership and administration of this much respected program.

Intake into the program was officially launched in April of 2014.

What is AECEO Certification?

- A unique professional development process leading to a credential that demonstrates a high standard of professional competence.
- The next professional step to take **after** registering with the College of Early Childhood Educators and becoming a member of your professional association, the AECEO.

Benefits to the ECE field and the Individual Professional

Becoming *AECEO Certified* supports professionalism within the field of ECE. With the establishment of the College of ECE (CECE) our field became recognized as a profession and therefore subject to a set of standards and a code of ethics. As of fall 2014 the CECE's Continuous Professional Learning program (CPL) will make "... ongoing education an important part of being a registered early childhood educator (RECE)".

The *AECEO Certification* process will help RECEs fulfill the requirements of the CECE by facilitating the self-assessment process and the subsequent development of a professional learning plan. The development of an E-Portfolio enables reflection and documentation of the process and will help serve as permanent evidence throughout your career.

The *AECEO Certification* process supports reflective practice, improves professional skills, and reinforces the values and beliefs that led you to this work. Building an E-Portfolio allows RECEs to demonstrate that they remain current, can respond to personal and professional challenges, and continue to learn.

*Please note that this process is intended for RECEs who wish to **become** AECEO Certified. Current AECEO Certified members are not required to renew their AECEO Certification under this process.*

AECEO.C

What does the new process look like?

Phase I

- Register for and successfully complete the online **Professional Module**
- Register for and successfully complete the online **E-Portfolio Module**

Phase II

- Register for and successfully complete the E-Portfolio development/assessment process.
- The benchmarks for the E-Portfolio are based on the CECE *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*.

Timelines

There is no overall timeline applied to the *AECEO Certification* process, however, each online module must be completed within **six months of enrollment**.

The AECEO recognizes that each applicant is unique in their learning style and is able to set their own timeline for completion of the E-Portfolio. Therefore there is no deadline for submitting this requirement.

Our aim is to help all applicants succeed professionally and attain **AECEO Certified** status.

We would like at this time to formally express the AECEO's profound thanks and sincere appreciation to the members of the Certification Advisory Committee, who led the review and launch of the new process, for their support, time, effort and expertise. They exemplify professionalism in every way and the renewal of Certification could not have been accomplished without them.

Gwen Berry, Stacy Ryder, Monica Bissett, Diane Kashin, Lucille Kelleher, Sue Tam

For more information and/or to learn how you can register in this valuable program please contact
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AECEO Certification The next step in your professional journey



As I reflect on the process of Certification, I realize that it was not about the amount of work held tightly between the binder covers of my portfolio, but rather the process of my self-awareness of my professional practice as a Registered Early Childhood Educator. This learning experience provided me the opportunity to think deeper about my leadership role in my daily practice and reflect on my personal growth throughout the certification process. I have learned more about myself through this process and can confidently state that my journey in life-long learning will not stop here.

Tracy Saarikoski, RECE, AECEO.C.



Completing my AECEO certification is one of the biggest, most satisfying and rewarding experiences I have had in my most recent professional career. Certification has taught me so much about myself, my work ethics and my personal philosophy on early childhood education. It has given me direction on the future of my career as well as improved my confidence in my knowledge and competencies.

Susanna Tam, RECE, AECEO.C.



I am a strong advocate for lifelong learning and after having completed my B.A. and ECE, was looking for a professional development opportunity that would enhance my knowledge of the profession. The Certification process more than met my goals and expectations as I now have a stronger sense of the roles and responsibilities of a supervisor as well as a keen sense of where this wonderful profession can take me.

Jane Tousignant, RECE, AECEO.C.

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Outdoor Natural Spaces for Learning Inspiration for RECEs

By Dr. Diane Kashin, RECE, AECEO.C
and Sinéad Rafferty, M.Ed., RECE

In a recent article entitled "Outdoor learning: Education's next revolution" (http://www.salon.com/2014/02/16/outdoor_learning_educations_next_revolution/) a case is made for learning outdoors because being close to nature demands better use of the senses and can boost children's attention. Outdoor natural spaces enable us to be more alert. The author of the article suggests that this makes sense, given that natural environments were the first classrooms of *Homo sapiens*, the places where human beings learned to forage, hunt, and survive. Given what we know about the importance of early childhood education, it is obvious that if children are going to learn about the great outdoors, the learning should begin early.

The forest school movement in Canada, which is aimed at early childhood education, will be an impetus for change as early childhood educators throughout the country embrace the potential of learning in the outdoors. Forest schools originated in Europe in the early 20th century and today there is a rich history with research to support the benefits of children at very young ages having access to forest school learning. In many parts of Europe it is common practice for children to attend forest school preschools. The research

suggests that children with early forest learning experiences have better social skills, greater ability to work in groups and higher self-esteem when transferring to school, leading to higher educational achievements. In the UK the number of forest schools is increasing, with some being privately operated and others run by the local authorities for children living in urban areas. These UK forest schools are not confined to the younger age group; they are also used by primary and secondary school pupils and are seen as particularly beneficial for young adults and people with learning difficulties.

http://www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/forest_schools/background_to_fei_schools/

Recently, I spent five days in a forest with 20 other educators, a three person research team from Queen's University and two amazing Forest School instructors, Jon Cree from the United Kingdom and Marlene Power, Executive Director, Forest School Canada. Together we began a journey to become certified *Level Three Forest School Practitioners*. To say that I was out of my element would be a huge understatement. To say that I left the forest forever changed would not be an exaggeration. I have been a creature of comfort most of my adult life. I haven't spent much time "roughing it" but my experience in the forest brought back very fond childhood memories spent messing about in the local creek and coming home covered in mud after a long day of playing outdoors. As a child I didn't worry about being comfortable but prior to the five days of forest school training I worried about being cold, wet or bait for mosquitos! In the end, by being prepared for the elements I was comfortable in the forest, and there I knew that the outdoors holds so much potential for learning. I came home with knowledge and skills that felt empowering and I know now that the greatest learning environment of all is outside the confines of four walls and a roof.

<http://tecribresearch.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/five-days-in-the-forest/>

Forest schools take place in woodlands and for the most part children are outside, in the forest, on a regular, sustained basis. Outdoor early learning, however, does not have to be limited to time spent in forests, as any natural setting like a ravine, pond, creek or small wooded area will do. Child care programs can also utilize local natural spaces such as beaches, lakes, meadows, parks or field schools on a regular and sustained basis to promote learning. Think about the outdoor natural spaces in close proximity to where you work. Think about the possibilities for learning.



Forest school learning is not a new trend – it's a movement!

We worry about the future of the environment. How can we expect children to care about the environment when they don't spend time outdoors and don't have a relationship with local flora and fauna? Young children need experiences in outdoor natural spaces because understanding the importance of the environment can only be accomplished in an outdoor learning setting. Forest school learning is not a new trend – it's a movement! By being part of the new revolution in education and a leader of a movement you have an opportunity to significantly shape the future of early learning. Here is a chance for early childhood educators to propel a concept that will change the future for the better. Forest school learning in Ontario begins with RECEs. You will be the ones to facilitate the increased exposure to learning in the forest and other outdoor, natural spaces for young children. This is where your expertise and experience will be valued and recognized. Forest school learning is intended to be "emergent". Emergent curriculum has its origins in early childhood education. You can make the forest come alive with learning possibilities for young children.

Marlene Power, Executive Director of Forest School Canada

(<http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/home/about-us>)

notes that forest school learning is different than environmental education because the defining feature is an emergent and play based curriculum. Early childhood educators are already leaders in emergent and play based programming and some have already taken up the cause of outdoor early learning. Take for example, Sinéad Rafferty.

Sinéad is a Registered Early Childhood Educator, with a Masters of Environmental Studies (MES), and a Graduate Diploma in Environmental Education and Sustainability. Her graduate research focused on integrating ecological literacy in early childhood programs and post-secondary pre-service education programs. She is actively involved in early childhood education and environmental communities, working in child care research and advocacy and volunteering for a range of environmental organizations, including urban nature centres and environmental film festivals. Sinéad currently works in the Kindergarten program at the University of Toronto Early Learning Centre, and teaches courses in Social Justice for the department of Early Childhood Education at Humber College. Critical inquiry into environmental and sustainability issues are ongoing threads in her work, volunteer, and outdoor experiences across Canada and abroad. Deeply inspired by models of Forest Kindergartens, Outdoor Preschools, and Emergent Curriculum, Sinéad hopes to create change in education that fosters more outdoor early childhood experiences, particularly in urban communities. Her passion is creating places and nature cultures of play and learning that nurture young children's embodied relationships with ecological life, and engaging educators towards critical ecological pedagogies that support an ethics of care for all humans and ecology. Sinead describes her research as:

...exploring pedagogical praxis in outdoor early childhood programs, as the research was carried out with some programs that are not specifically called "Forest School". In part of my research I explore educators' conceptualizations of "ecological literacy". But more generally, I explore educator's experiences of engaging children with pedagogies that support children's relationships with nature in outdoor early childhood programs. Of particular interest may be the various forms of literacies that emerge from outdoor experiences that go beyond educational emphasis on numeracy and alphabetic literacy. Literacies of movement, affectivity, ecology, wonder, and reciprocity are some examples of how children and educators engaged in learning/play experiences in the outdoors, which help foster other forms of learning and engagement with the world.

You can read Sinead's thesis at this link:

<http://www.childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/14/06/ecological-encounters-outdoor-early-childhood-education-pro%20->



Young children need experiences in outdoor natural spaces because understanding the importance of the environment can only be accomplished in an outdoor learning setting.

If you just want to incorporate stimulus from the forest or any outdoor natural spaces into your curriculum spend some time playing outside and explore your local forest, creek, pond or even meadow. There is much inspiration to be gleaned from the outdoors. Applied to any setting it can become part of the practice of any Registered Early Childhood Educator.

Unlike Sinéad, who inspires me, I have not worked directly with children for some time, but I have spent the better part of the last three decades journeying alongside others that do. I believe in the capacity of early childhood educators to lead a movement, and this movement is growing. In fact it feels like a revolution! I like the idea of joining a revolution because revolutions impact change and change is needed. Too many children spend far too much of their time indoors. The research is everywhere and you must see it in your own practice. Revolutions are not comfortable but I recommend stepping outside of your comfort zone and venturing into the forest because that is where the magic will happen. I know there are professionals out there who are going to be leaders in the forest school movement – who will want to take the Forest School practitioner's course, and there are groups of committed like-minded individuals such as the York Region Nature Collaborative who want to help make that happen.

The York Region Nature Collaborative (<http://www.yrnature.ca/>) is a collaborative of early years organizations and associations committed to improving access to nature programs for people of all ages in York Region and beyond. Working in partnership with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, they aim to support the growth of forest schools across the Greater Toronto Area. They will be providing workshops that will give a taste of what forest school learning is all about and what to expect in the practitioner's course. They are committed to making the practitioner's course available in the spring and will support an individual's own fundraising efforts to raise the money necessary to pay the course fees. Follow them on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/pages/York-Region-Nature-Collaborative/762273063812379?ref_type=bookmark and on Twitter <https://twitter.com/YRnature> for more information.



If this article has encouraged you to consider taking the practitioner's course to become certified in forest school learning, or if you just want information, you will find the links provided below helpful. The forest school practitioner's course offered by Forest School Canada is a commitment in both time and finances. It involves not only five days spent in a forest but eight months of follow up that includes planning and implementing six sessions with children and the creation of an e-portfolio. Not everyone will want to become a certified forest school practitioner but you can still make outdoor learning in natural spaces a daily provision for the children that you work with. If you just want to incorporate stimulus from the forest or any outdoor natural spaces into your curriculum spend some time playing outside and explore your local forest, creek, pond or even meadow. There is much inspiration to be gleaned from the outdoors. Applied to any setting it can become part of the practice of any Registered Early Childhood Educator.

For Further Information:

Check out these boards on Pinterest:

<http://www.pinterest.com/dianekashin/forest-schools-and-outdoor-classrooms/>
<http://www.pinterest.com/juppl/forest-nature-school/>

This article is a good one to read. It is about the forest school movement in Canada. Check the references for further resources
<http://www.learninglandscapes.ca/images/documents/ll-no13/maseachren.pdf>

This booklet gives some very practical examples of how you can incorporate forest school learning in your setting
http://www.leics.gov.uk/outdoor_learning_publication-2.pdf

Hope to see you in the forest! In the forest you will be happy

<http://blog.lululemon.com/a-little-forest-bathing-can-make-you-happier-and-healthier/>

CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE!



We are pleased to announce the launch of our brand new website. Our site has a fresh new look and is more user-friendly to enable easier navigation for our members and the public. Now it will be easier than ever to access the important resources you need. We hope you find our new site useful to your professional career as an ECE.

One of our goals in updating our site was to not only make it easier to navigate and find things but also make it easier for us to add and update information. Another feature of the new site is that you can now access the AECEO site on any smart device! The look and feel of **aeceo.ca** is that of a social media portal where users can interact with other members online and

share content easily with our *facebook* and *twitter* integration. Members can now also renew their membership and edit their contact information online.

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For more information please contact Lena DaCosta @ ldacosta@aeceo.ca

Endeavours to Enhance the Lives of Children with Autism through Nature-Based Learning

WindReach Farm is a charitable, not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing an inclusive, safe and welcoming natural environment to individuals of all ages and abilities. For the past 25 years, WindReach Farm has offered a fully accessible, barrier-free facility with specialized features and programs designed specifically to meet the needs of those with physical, psychological, and intellectual challenges. As a 105-acre fully functioning farm, WindReach Farm strives to provide individuals with exceptionalities with the opportunity to enjoy nature and farming-related activities with their family and friends.

Moving forward in its mission to enhance the lives of individuals with special needs, in 2013 WindReach Farm began collaborating with Dr. Stuart Shanker, the Director of the Milton and Ethel Harris Research Initiative, with the hope of establishing a nature-based education and training program for young children with autism. Following Dr. Shanker's initial visit to WindReach Farm, he wrote the following testimonial:

The first thought I had when I visited WindReach Farm was: every child in Canada would benefit from this experience. We are doing so much work across the country today, trying to help our children and youth learn how to self-regulate so that they can sustain a state of being calmly focused and alert; for it is in this state that the potential to learn is most pronounced. And this is precisely what happens at WindReach: a soothing environment has been created that instantly reduces a child's stress and promotes that inner state of calmness and self-awareness. So much thought has been given to creating a nurturing environment and the results are immediately apparent: not just in the children and youth who are all happily engaged in their studies or some activity on the farm, but in the staff as well, who are all smiling and remarkably attentive.

WindReach truly is an extraordinary phenomenon and the whole country will benefit from its message and its methods.

*Stuart Shanker
December 10, 2012*

WindReach Farm

This vision is still very much alive as WindReach Farm, Dr. Stuart Shanker and a team of colleagues and multidisciplinary professionals continue

to make headway in the development of this unique learning program that will harness the extraordinary benefits of a natural farming environment to enhance self-regulatory skills, attention, reciprocity, social problem-solving skills, social-emotional capacities and communication skills.



Anticipated to begin in the fall of 2014, WindReach Farm's groundbreaking program will offer children three and four years of age (with a formal autism diagnosis) the opportunity to participate in this unique learning environment in the accompaniment of a parent, guardian or caregiver. The inclusion of caregivers in the program will allow parents and guardians to observe and take part in the learning and training that their children experience which, in turn, will help with the transfer of learned skills to other environments such as home and school. Caregivers will be provided with one-on-one training of their own in the areas of speech and language development, occupational therapy, and mental health. Additionally, group education sessions will introduce parents and caregivers to evidence-based therapy and learning techniques while providing a venue to share personal successes and challenges as well as participate in therapeutic and/or respite activities.

The children's component of the program will be composed of a variety of large-group, small-group, and individual learning sessions that will focus on helping the children develop their capacity to self-regulate, engage and relate to others, initiate and respond to a variety of types of communication, engage in shared social problem-solving, and master essential foundation skills. By integrating elements from the Ministry of Education's Full-Day Kindergarten Program, WindReach Farm's program

will focus on establishing a strong foundation for learning in a safe, inclusive and caring play-based environment. Children will be provided with a variety of open-ended materials, environments, and experiences to encourage exploration and social problem-solving. Such materials and environments, which can be easily moved, combined, redesigned, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways, will inspire imagination, creativity, curiosity, and desire, all key components of inquiry-based, child-centred learning.

The program's structured learning sessions will take place in a play-based and natural learning environment and will focus on personal and social development, literacy and numeracy skills, sensory stimulation, music, the arts, and physical activity and health. The rich and engaging outdoor farm setting will provide an avenue for the children to explore the above mentioned developmental areas in a way that is enticing and exciting. For instance, rather than learning about patterning through the use of standardized blocks or predetermined education materials, the children will head outdoors to create patterning designs out of rocks, sticks, and whatever else they may find on their journey, or they will learn about various prepositions of position by watching the goats jumping on and off straw bales or going in and out of their shelters. By harnessing the children's natural curiosity and interest in the world around them, the program will help to inspire imagination and creativity on the children's own terms and in their own unique way all in a naturally self-regulating environment.



WindReach Farm has engaged many collaborators to make this program successful and will share any resultant data and best practices with all interested parties. Furthermore, the Farm has committed to providing field placement and secondment opportunities to ensure the findings are shared with as many people as is possible.

For more information about WindReach Farm's innovative nature-based program for children with autism or any other of WindReach Farm's programs, please visit www.windreachfarm.org or email CEO, Kate Bird at kate.bird@windreachfarm.org



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The AECEO welcomes our newest members

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By Marlene Hamill, RECE

As a Registered Early Childhood Educator with 23 years of experience working in a child care setting with different age groups, I was happy with my role as a RECE. Unlike some people, I did not aspire to become a supervisor or director of a child care centre, nor was I looking for a career change. So why, then, did I suddenly decide to return to University at the age of 50 to upgrade my education?



My reason was a simple one: full-day kindergarten was being implemented in September 2014, which would directly affect my child care centre, and my job. Everything was uncertain, and I knew that it would be prudent to consider a new career path. Many months were spent researching different career options, colleges, and programs, and I realized that perhaps I did want to move from working directly with children into a different role in early learning and care. Eventually I chose the George Brown College Early Childhood Leadership (ECL) Degree Program, because it was a new program, and it sounded intriguing. Moreover, George Brown College offered the ECL Program as part-time studies for years 3 and 4, which allowed me to work my regular half-day shift at a child care centre, and to attend classes on a full-time basis in the afternoons and evenings. This program was perfect for my needs, but why should other people consider a degree in Early Childhood Leadership? What makes this program unique?

To answer this question, I interviewed Professor Gail Hunter, the Coordinator of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership Program at George Brown College. She explained that this program is unique in Ontario and Canada because three different Ontario colleges offer the identical ECL program, and part of the agreement between these colleges is the program's transferability. For example, if someone attending George Brown College, or Sheridan College moved to London, Ontario, he or she could continue in the ECL program at Fanshawe College without interruption. Another unique feature of the ECL program is that graduates are hired because employers value the placement and internship training.

The ECL Program was created because one of the recommendations from *With our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*¹, was for colleges to establish more Bachelor of Arts programs for Early Childhood Educators. Out of that recommendation came the focus on leadership, in order to better prepare students for the demands of the sector. Although the sector already has really strong leaders, it was felt that the colleges needed to up the ante in this area. So what courses are being offered to prepare students to become leaders?

The first year of the ECL program focuses on understanding children, early childhood programs, and professional skill foundations. The second year covers evidence-based understanding and curriculum design, as well as infrastructure design. Field practicums enable the students to utilize their newly acquired skills and put them into use in a real child care setting. By year three, the focus turns to leadership for quality and professional specialization, and in the final year, students focus on a research project, and they are prepared for the workforce. A 14-week internship of the student's choice at the end of year three is an exciting aspect of the program. In the past, students have interned in early years centres, child care settings, advocacy organizations, quality assurance, supporting new Canadian families, as well as interning internationally. It sounds as though the students are well prepared to enter the work force; however, what are the career opportunities?

There are numerous and varied career opportunities available upon graduation. Some graduates have chosen to work in early childhood settings as supervisors, or in full day kindergarten programs as Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECE), while others have chosen to further their studies in order to become teachers, or professors. Graduates from the ECL Program with child care experience and their ECL degree are eligible to apply for ECE and ECA field supervision positions. Other opportunities include: becoming a caseworker, which focuses on early intervention, or working with families in order

¹ Pascal, C. (2009). *With our best future in mind: Implementing early learning in Ontario*. Toronto: ON. Queen's Printer for Ontario.

to identify children's physical or behavioural issues. As well, there are opportunities for a career at the three levels of government, such as becoming a policy analyst, or a licensing inspector. Another career path includes working with the media to provide age-appropriate television programming for children.

According to Hunter, out of the 9 students who graduated in 2013, and the 18 who graduated in 2014, all of the students from the ECL Program have either secured a full-time job in the sector, or they are furthering their education at York University, University of Toronto, OISE, Brock, and Ottawa University, to name a few.

Donna Davis, the Coordinator at Fanshawe College, concurs that the hiring ratio for the ECL Program is excellent. Out of the 14 students who graduated in 2013, and the 13 students who graduated in 2014, only 1%-2% of students have not found jobs in the ECL field. Approximately 50% have secured employment in supervisory roles in child care centres across Canada, with one international placement at a Children's Museum. The remainder of the students chose to further their education with a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Education, or an Autism Certificate. Davis explained that Fanshawe College supports students with their employment search through the College's Career Services department, which offers support in resume and curriculum vitae (CV) development. "In their final year, students are supported by faculty to pursue either further education, or employment, with faculty supplying references as requested. Students are encouraged to continually update their portfolios to maintain standards of practice. Fanshawe's website posts positions weekly that are monitored by our Career Services department."



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Davis continues: "Our close relationship with our community partners informs both students and agencies of anticipated upcoming graduates and students of possible positions. It is an exciting time for our consortium of George Brown, Sheridan and Fanshawe. In the midst of the changing landscape of Early Childhood in Ontario our program offers students and our communities a unique and innovative opportunity to increase our skill set and understanding of the importance of research in our field of study. Over the past three years [the program coordinators] have seen the inquiries change from "is this a real degree" to "so I can actually go on to my masters then PhD?" This is hugely significant for our profession on so many levels. As we strive to be recognized by our peers and colleagues in our own field as well as other professional fields, we have a unique opportunity to demonstrate our willingness to pursue and gain the very best we can in our incredible field of Early Childhood. Transition and change can be difficult and yet rewarding and enlightening. At this time in our [sector] the ECL degree offers opportunities for affirmation of practice [...] and discovering new horizons in research and graduate studies."

I have found George Brown professors to be extremely supportive with respect to the program and classes. The courses are interesting, motivating and thought provoking, which allows for reflection and critical thinking. I have even introduced some of the material from my classes to my child care centre.

I'm not the only one who thinks highly about the Early Childhood Leadership Program. Some George Brown College students and Sheridan College students have provided their testimonials regarding the ECL program:

"I like having the opportunity to access a variety of placements and internship opportunities that give us real world experience, such as going to Ontario Early Years centres, family resource centres, quality assurance settings, and full-day kindergarten programs, so that we are well prepared when we enter the field."

George Brown College ECL Student
Jenny Rajewski, RECE

"The Early Childhood Leadership program at George Brown College is great because it provides students with a wider view on early childhood issues. It gives students the opportunity to connect the issues from micro level perspective to a macro level perspective. In addition, the program supports students in becoming well-rounded professionals. With leadership and advocacy knowledge, students can find ways to make a difference in communities and in the larger society for a better future."

George Brown College ECL Student
Michelle Li

"I enjoy the ECL program at Sheridan because I am challenged by the diverse faculty to think critically in my work with children and within the child care sector. I enjoy that I am given the opportunity to perform research and to also gain practical skills and knowledge through an internship work term. I have been able to understand, through various courses, how child care fits into the larger social framework of Canadian society and this is incredibly valuable to me."

Sheridan College ECL Student,
Bethany Grady, RECE

"I have always been a believer in being a life long learner and as I have been in a Manager position for over 20 years, the ECL was a good match for me to fulfill my Professional Development goals. Going back to school was a bit intimidating but I have learnt many new skills that have empowered me to continue to advocate for this sector. The classes are interactive, the faculty are knowledgeable and the materials taught are relevant to the field of ECE."

George Brown College ECL Student
Sue Feltoe, RECE, Manager,
Casa Loma Childcare Centre

High quality leaders can motivate and inspire others to reach their potential whether they are a supervisor at a child care, a case worker, or an advocate for their profession, and presently there appears to be a need for more qualified leaders in the early years sector. All in all, it seems that the Early Childhood Leadership Program helps to prepare individuals for a career in a leadership position. The colleges offer a variety of courses, options, supportive faculty, and real-life experience through the ECL program. As well, there is a variety of career options upon graduation. Whether you are a life long learner, or you are looking for different career options, perhaps now is the time to consider furthering your education with an Early Childhood Leadership degree.

At the time of writing this article, the author was unable to interview Nathalie Di Francesco, the Coordinator at Sheridan College, for her feedback regarding the ECL Program.

Marlene Hamill is a student in the Early Childhood Leadership Program at George Brown College and is currently completing a 14 week internship at the AECEO.

Addressing ECE Student Needs

Background

The AECEO has always had a student member category but it has only been in the last few years that we have become aware of a noticeable increase in the number of student members. Today 37% of individual members are students studying early childhood education at colleges and universities. While the benefits extended to student members have always acknowledged their financial restrictions, i.e. a substantially reduced membership fee and professional development activities offered at no cost or at a significant discount, the resources and information available to them were identical to those available to professional ECEs already working in the field.

The AECEO strongly believes that student members have a very important role to play in their professional association. They represent an essential source of energy and ideas. They are also the voice of the future for the profession. It is therefore imperative to the viability of the association that the voice of students be not only heard but respected. Student members have an investment in ensuring the profession remains healthy and progressive.

In our ongoing efforts to support our student members and respond effectively to their needs the AECEO reached out to them and their faculty to learn if any gaps in information/resources existed. Understanding of course that colleges and universities already have many supports in place we wanted to make sure that we were not duplicating services but instead enhancing them. A survey was distributed via ECE departments asking both students and faculty to identify what additional resources would be most helpful.

The feedback we received confirmed that additional resources housed within an online portal specifically for students would be a valuable source of support. We were also able to gather data on specific areas of need.

Next Steps in Responding to Student Needs

We are in the final stages of completing the online resource portal designed exclusively for students. Throughout the development and building process we have worked closely with placement students at the AECEO. Many of these students took a hands-on approach and therefore have contributed directly to the content and look of the portal. We are forever grateful to these students for their contribution to this important project.

The launch date for the Student Portal is set for fall 2014. It is our hope this online portal will help further support ECE students by enabling them to access valuable resources that are not otherwise available.

Survey Findings

Among the list of subjects identified by students as being the most important were:

Post graduate career planning	29%
Job search and interview skills	24%
Ongoing professional learning opportunities	19%

The topics identified by faculty were only slightly different:

Post graduate career planning	23%
Ongoing professional learning opportunities	17%
Staying current on research related to early learning and care	15%

Detailed survey responses showed that ECE students have a wide range of content interests. Among the topics identified were:

- Navigating Government Policy
- Professionalism
- Staying Current on ECE Issues
- Research to Practice
- ECE Portfolio's: The Digital Movement
- Cultural Competence
- Work Life Balance: A Place to Decompress

FOUNDATIONS FOR RECE PRACTICE IN FDK: A three part webinar series



Webinar 1:

ECE Principles in Full Day Kindergarten

This webinar discusses the 6 ECE principles articulated in the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework. For each principle, participants find out how these principles inform decision making in the early years setting. Participants are encouraged to reflect what these principles mean to them and connect them with their current practice.

Webinar 2:

The Learning Community in Full Day Kindergarten

Early Childhood Educators help each other establish a strong foundation for learning the early years. This webinar introduces participants to what is involved in building a learning community that supports young children and their learning. This webinar identifies significant members in this community as articulated in the Full Day Kindergarten program and discuss the roles they play in building a consistent learning environment for young children.

Webinar 3:

Learning Approaches in Full Day Kindergarten

When children's learning is meaningful and authentic, their learning is memorable. This webinar explores how the Full Day Kindergarten program captivates children's natural curiosity and fascination by offering opportunities for exploration and investigation through the inquiry approach.

This series of webinars explores principles and learning approaches articulated in ELECT (also referred to as the Early Learning Framework) and how these underpin the Full Day Kindergarten program.

Participants will use an accompanying workbook/manual to listen, reflect and connect their current practice.

"I will be walking away from the series with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the important job that DECEs are tasked with in full-day kindergarten."

"The webinars were extremely informative and I enjoyed hearing from other participants."

"These webinars were great! I look forward to taking this back to our classroom team!"

Location: Your Computer

Time: At your convenience

Cost: Free to AECEO Members
\$75 Non Members or become a member and access anytime for free in addition to many other resources available online

**Available
April 15, 2014**



<http://www.aeceo.ca>

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