

ECE's Early Experiences in Full-Day Kindergarten: "They Just Weren't Ready For Us!"

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Abstract

Full-day kindergarten in Ontario is built on a legislated partnership between Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and kindergarten teachers governed by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). These partners share professional space in local schools and have a duty to cooperate. A narrative case study used open-ended, semi-structured questions to learn how RECE participants' experience daily events within this partnership. Three RECE participants, who identified as female, were employed by three different district school boards. Employing positioning theory (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999) and a thematic and plot analysis of RECE storied daily practices (Creswell, 2009), this paper provides a deeper understanding of how RECEs position themselves within the partnership. Four broad themes emerged: communication barriers between partners, marginalized status within the school hierarchy, differential valuing of roles and responsibilities of the partners, and limited RECE professional learning opportunities.

An examination of full-day kindergarten 10 years later suggests RECEs continue to experience systemic and structural inequities due to policies, roles and responsibilities, hierarchies, and professional inequities in the full-day kindergarten partnership.

Key words

Hierarchy, inter-professional, kindergarten, legislation, marginalization, policy, Registered Early Childhood Educator, teacher, roles, responsibilities

Author Biography

Rose Walton is a Ph.D. student at Brock University working in the field of cognition and learning. The author is interested in early literacy and how stakeholders contribute to family literacy practices in the field of early childhood education and care. Publications have focused on inter-professional conversations and practices and understanding play from multiple perspectives. As a former kindergarten teacher and system literacy coordinator with inter-professional experiences, Ms. Walton continues to study early literacy of families and inter-professionals. Currently, Ms. Walton has created and designed the Backpack Project encouraging fifth grade students to read picture books to young children and develop deep comprehension questions for take home reading backpacks for kindergarten children and their families.

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Full-day kindergarten (FDK) was introduced in Ontario in 2010, inspired by a government-commissioned report by Charles Pascal titled *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario (2009)*. The report recommended a comprehensive and integrated approach to early learning to support the transition between childcare and school. The plan included a partnership between Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) and Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) kindergarten teachers in full-day kindergarten classrooms.

This article is adapted from a qualitative narrative case study employing positioning theory, done as part of a Master of Education thesis, *Early Childhood Educators' Experiences of the Ontario Full-Day Early Learning: Promises to Keep* (Walton, 2013) that investigated the roles and responsibilities of three female RECEs working in Ontario kindergarten classrooms. The study was warranted because the introduction of full-day kindergarten under Bill 242, Amendment to the Education Act (2010) marked the beginning of a partnership between two historically marginalized, predominantly female professional groups governed by separate regulatory bodies: The Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE), established in 2007, and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), established in 1996. Members of these groups—RECEs and OCT teachers—were bound by duty to cooperate and support the learning of 3–6 year-olds in a school setting. This inter-professional partnership was positioned as one of *care* (RECEs) and *education* (kindergarten teachers).

In *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario (2009)*, Charles Pascal employed the standards of practice from two regulatory colleges—the CECE and the OCT—to identify the roles and responsibilities of the partners. According

to Pascal, RECEs are responsible for connecting with community organizations and implementation of before- and after-school care and summer programs; evaluation of curriculum expectations, reporting to parents and preparing children for the first grade are responsibilities of the teacher. Planning and implementation of the program, monitoring and assessing children's development throughout the ten-month school program, and communicating with families is the shared responsibility of the RECEs and teachers. Both Ministry documents and the Pascal Report state that RECEs and the teachers contribute to the classroom environment equally (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013):

The Early Learning Program for 4- and 5-year-old children should be staffed by teams of certified teachers and registered early childhood educators (ECEs). Local flexibility should be possible, but two "non-negotiable" essentials must always be included: educators skilled at applying child development knowledge and a strong and effective parent engagement strategy (Pascal, 2009, p. 34).

Thus the roles and responsibilities of RECEs and teachers were framed through legislation/policies and program documents such as Bill 242, section 16 (242.1). This formal policy document stipulates that RECEs and teachers have a duty to cooperate with each other.

Multiple support documents were provided to educators, administrators, and the public, including documents from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Children and Youth Services. *Full-day Early Learning Kindergarten Draft* (OME, 2010), a program document for kindergarten educators (including teachers and ECEs) and *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT),

Best Start Panel on Early Learning (OME, 2007) framed the roles and responsibilities of the complementary inter-professional partnership. In these documents, RECEs were described as providing emotional warmth influencing children's behaviours. The *Full-day Early Learning Kindergarten Draft Version* (OME, 2010) focused on teacher expectations related to curriculum content rather than relationships between the teachers and children. A follow-up study, *A Meta-Perspective on the Evaluation of Full-Day Kindergarten during the First Two Years of Implementation* (OME, 2013), reviewed the FDK program. The 2013 study suggested teachers and RECEs were meeting the needs of the children as collegial partners.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education and Care Policies

The *Ontario 2010 kindergarten draft program* outlined recommendations to address the social/emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being of children. *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework (2013)* outlines systemic needs of young children and families, including before- and after-school care led by RECEs and delivered by district school boards and licensed childcare providers. RECEs and OCTs would be working together as inter-professionals in schools sharing the same space, resources and materials to support kindergarten children. This policy framework recognizes the education background of employees, pay equity, and labour relations (Friendly, 2008) as a systemic paradigm shift of the roles and responsibilities of the RECEs and their kindergarten teachers partners. *A Meta-Perspective on the Evaluation of Full-Day Kindergarten during the First Two Years of Implementation* (OME, 2013) reviewed elements of the full-day kindergarten program, including these partnerships. While the report indicated that children's needs were being met, the introduction suggested that the staff roles and responsibilities required continued clarification. The Ministry of Education would need to monitor the growth of the full-day kindergarten team and commit to knowledge mobilization of inquiry-based play learning through professional learning.

Research on Inter-professional Partnerships

An inter-professional partnership is defined as "two or more professionals learn[ing] from each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care" (Liakos, Frigas, Antypas, Zikos, Diomidous & Mantas, 2009, p. S43). According to Wilford and Doyle (2006) communication commonalities and cooperative practices produce collaborative knowledge in such partnerships. Inter-professional practice has been reviewed in the literature of health, social work, and education as an organizational, collaborative framework to provide integrated care based on knowledge and communication skills of professionals from diverse backgrounds. MacIntosh and McCormick (2001) describe these partnerships as "complex," as partners negotiate skills through listening and communication leading to professional growth. Liaskosis et al. (2009) contend that partnerships may converge or may live parallel lives that create barriers to communication due to hierarchical structures.

The literature review highlights issues of power and privilege within the partnerships under study. While little literature exists in relation to RECE/OCT partnerships in Canada or abroad, a review of the research that does exist suggests that these professional partnerships are complicated by a division between care and education and how they are valued.

In 2002, Toronto First Duty (TFD) family centres initiated partnerships between professionals employed by City of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board as models of integrated services (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011). The TFD project revealed "issues related to professional turf, funding, staffing, leadership turnover, and working without system support across sectors" (Pelletier, 2013 p. 377) among diverse professionals.

Identities and Professional Education

The age-old notion that caring for children is "natural" and "women's work" rather than a foundational public resource perpetuates the stubborn undervaluing of gendered care labour. Thus, the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector remains marginalized and undervalued. Teachers and their

organizations (mainly unions) have also faced struggles, but they tend to enjoy a greater professional status and are not subject to the same level of undervaluing in Canada. Professional identities are shaped by a dynamic process based on an ebb and flow of values and experiences (Thomas and Beauchamp (2011). Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle, & Orr (2000) describe teachers' roles as intuitive and based on personal experiences. Personal experiences are also reflected in the roles of RECEs as nurturers and educators.

Teachers and RECEs are each governed by a core set of values and beliefs related to care, trust, respect, and integrity. Each organization's standards of practice and ethics are outlined on the organizations' websites as identifying knowledge, skills, and practices within the context of professionalism. RECEs may have accreditation from a two-year college program or a four-year university degree in early childhood studies. RECEs work in diverse roles such as un/licensed childcare centres, children's services and family support programs, First Nations, advocacy with children up to age twelve, and pre/in-service education. Kindergarten teachers have primary school qualifications, with opportunities to extend learning opportunities through the Faculty of Education. Qualified teachers have the option of registering for additional qualifications at an accredited university, e.g., Kindergarten Part I, II, and specialist. Teachers may gain additional qualifications and move up the pay grid.

A variety of professional learning opportunities supported by various providers such as YMCA, child and youth networks, mental health, outdoor education facilities, and formal education institutions support RECEs' professional learning opportunities. RECEs and kindergarten teachers are both required to participate in continuous professional learning. However, RECEs must provide annual proof of professional learning to remain in good standing with their regulatory body. The different educational backgrounds, professional identities, and the fact that, historically, teachers work alone in classrooms, potentially contribute to a power imbalance in the Ontario model of RECEs and kindergarten teachers as educator partners (Underwood, Di Santo, Valeo, and Langford, 2016).

Status of RECEs

The work of RECEs has been characterized by poor wages, difficult labour conditions, and declining professional status (Fenech, Waniganayake & Fleet, 2009). Rosemberg (2003) found early childhood education teachers were considered an extension of domestic care and thus undervalued and underpaid, being compared to women with limited education working in home care. In Scandinavian countries more than half of all preschool teachers hold a university degree with specialization in early child development (Kuisma & Sandberg, 2008). In Britain, raising professional standards through policies has been met with tension due to misunderstandings of the role and poor wages.

Ontario RECEs must register with the College of Early Childhood Educators and maintain qualifications as part of public records. RECEs are powerless to change imposed professionalism definitions by the college. Harwood, Klopper, Osayen, & Vanderlee (2013) contend RECE professional judgement is undervalued in relation to the employment of professional standards. Osgood (2016) argues that "increased state regulation and top down policy prescription represents a direct challenge to 'professionalism from within'" (p. 191) as collaborative practices and working relationships are being eroded by standards of practice.

Positioning Theory

Positioning theory is a social constructionist approach within gender studies. Lave & Wenger (1991) argue that positionality can be addressed through transparency, reflection, and identity. Transparency about one's positionality within a contextual space can make one aware of personal biases, personal perspectives, and socio-political viewpoints, opening up opportunities to share information and implications for practice.

Language shapes identity as RECEs and teachers negotiate gender-related spaces in a partnership. Negotiating spaces through gender-related language means one claims their rights while prescribing duties for others. Positioning theory focuses on how the participants demonstrate their roles and interact while communicating with one another in their roles and

making references to each one's role commensurate of rights and duties (Glazier, 2009).

All three of the RECE study participants identified as female. The RECEs and teachers were expected to interact with one another to support young children in the classroom. The RECEs and teachers communicated on a superficial level to fulfill their roles. Sheehan, Robertson, & Ormond (2007) reported the significance of shared terms and understandings in a field such as education. It positions one professionally through commonplace terms in education related to one's professional identity.

The term *complementary partnership* (Ontario Ministry of Education 2010) describes a core element of the full-day kindergarten program whereby RECEs and teachers equally contribute to the program. According to Langford et al. (2016), a split system of roles and responsibilities positioned RECEs in *care* and teachers in *education* reproducing different statuses for each professional group and thus inequalities. Manor-Binyamini (2007) suggests professionals unpack terms to communicate, plan, and open entry points for access to resources, including knowledge leading to new perspectives and professional learning opportunities.

I have worked with RECEs and OCT kindergarten teachers in various capacities since the beginning of full-day kindergarten in Ontario. My positioning means that I might appreciate the partnership from a particular perspective as a teacher and researcher. I viewed the partnership as a negotiated space between two female-intensive professional groups through the lens of positioning theory (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999).

Research Questions

The research questions were posed to better understand the mandated partnership of RECEs and OCT kindergarten teachers. The following research questions were posed:

- How is the legislated partnership between registered RECE teachers and certified teachers from the Ontario College of Teachers defined and represented in official texts about Ontario's full-day kindergarten programs and RECE teachers'

accounts of their partnership activities?

- How are RECE teachers positioned within this discursively produced partnership?
- What role(s) might different professional discourses play in the positioning?
- What role(s) make differences in power and status play in the positioning?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the 2013 study was to understand how RECEs shared the mandated interactional space with OCT kindergarten teachers at the beginning of the full-day kindergarten rollout. While examining a very small sample of three RECEs storied practices employing a narrative case study method, I wanted to understand the social dynamics of collaborative partnerships and roles and responsibilities from the perspective of RECEs. In 2013, research in this area was limited because the initiative was relatively new. The broader goal of the study was to open a professional dialogue between RECEs and teachers to co-construct a shared professional space.

Narrative Case Study

Methodology

My study employed a qualitative narrative case study method (Gay, Mills, & Airasion, 2009) to explore the experiences of three individuals while using thematic and plot analyses of their responses to open-ended, semi-structured questions. RECE participants were asked to describe their experiences in the kindergarten classroom position in partnership with the teacher. Open-ended interview questions allowed participants to steer the direction of the conversation to ideas and thoughts about which they felt passionate. The interview component of my 2013 thesis study was conducted in three different district school boards in Ontario and did not include the district school board where I was employed. I explored the relationship between RECEs and teachers from the RECEs' perspective as well as the legislation—the Amendment to the Education Act 2010, Bill 242.

Findings From Interviews with RECEs

I contacted fifteen principals in two district school boards in Ontario. I did not contact anyone from the school board where I was employed. No one returned my invitations through letters nor my face to face inquiries about the study. While attending a multi-board workshop, I met a RECE and OCT team who were interested in the study and the RECE, Amina, offered to help. Another RECE, Mary, heard about the study through a superintendent I met at a Ministry of Education session and offered to be interviewed. I met another RECE, Talia, through a colleague who heard about the study. None of the participants were known to each other nor did they have contact with one another throughout the process. The district school board represented urban and rural areas as well as diverse communities. After a year of trying to recruit RECEs for the study I made the decision to begin the semi-structured interviews with the three participants who offered to be interviewed. Three RECEs from three different district school boards engaged in separate interviews. The RECEs in the study spoke from their perspective as partners in the full-day kindergarten program.

RECEs as Outsiders

The three RECEs referred to their teaching partner's position as privileged. RECE participants all agreed that this privilege was because teachers were already in the system with established relationships with colleagues, administration, and the community. The RECEs' outsider status was reflected in rates and modes of pay, contract terms and negotiations, allocation of planning time, and differences in opportunities for professional learning and advancement. The participants said teachers knew how to navigate the system and negotiate roles with colleagues to access materials and resources.

Rates and modes of pay

The rate of pay was higher for teachers, who were paid a salary rather than an hourly rate over twelve months. The RECEs commented that the teachers did

not have to seek employment benefits during lay-off periods in the summer months, as was the case of RECEs who were paid over ten months. RECEs are required to seek other employment in the summer as their contract is for a ten-month period.

Contract terms and negotiations

Collective agreements negotiated by labour unions bind both RECEs and teachers. RECE participants noted contractual differences in hours of work, supervision, and pay grids. In addition, representation of RECEs in bargaining units as part of the collective agreement at the time of the study lacked consistency. Representation was from different unions, including the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Elementary Teachers of Ontario, Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), and Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). Talia indicated she was on the bargaining team for her colleagues, but, at the time of the study—more than a year later—RECEs in her district school board still did not have a collective agreement.

Amina described the bargaining unit representing her as disorganized and chaotic. In her case, RECEs and EAs belonged to the same bargaining unit but RECEs did not feel their role was represented or treated fairly. For example, Amina indicated RECEs had a probationary period of two years in their district school board, while EAs at that board only had a ten-month probationary period. Amina indicated lack of an agreement prolonged probationary periods for RECEs. Amina indicated in the interview:

We're on two years' probation so everybody is hush-hush! It's twenty-four months' probation. I'm not permanent staff until January 2013. That was a decision made by our union.

Allocation of planning time

Contractual issues related to a lack of planning time for RECEs led to a breakdown in communication. Teachers had negotiated planning time within the instructional minutes of the school day. All three RECE participants indicated a lack of planning time led to unpaid work after school hours. RECEs are paid

an hourly wage while OCTs are paid a salary. Amina indicated:

Planning time. Lots of things I have to do at home. It goes into my family time. Maybe they don't get to do things they want to do. We have so much to offer and so little time. We don't get much money anyway. I don't get paid for stuff I do at home and when I stay after school two times a month.

Mary stated:

We were told during our latest round of contract negotiations that we would get prep time when hell freezes over! We start a half hour before the bell. Most of that time is spent setting up the room for the day. Teachers are not required to be in the room at that time. My school has early entry so I only have fifteen minutes to set up before the children are let in. We are required to stay thirty minutes after the bell. This can be used to prep, but we also must clean tables, tidy the room, etc. Also, teachers are not required to stay, so we could be on our own at this time. My partner and I typically have about fifteen to twenty minutes a day together to prep and plan. Most ECEs I know, myself included, work through breaks in order to get things done.

Talia indicated she did not receive lieu time or overtime compensation for work outside of the instructional day. Mary indicated that lack of planning time has an impact on the working relationship with her partner. All three of the participants indicated they planned incidentally with their teacher partner and described the planning time as “planning on the fly.”

Differences in opportunities for professional learning and advancement

The responses of the RECEs were also heavily weighted by references to exclusionary practices created by structural barriers. The RECE participants commented that summer professional learning opportunities for teachers took into account their interests and curriculum needs. In contrast, similar professional learning opportunities for RECEs were provided outside of school board agencies. The full-day kindergarten partners were not immersed in similar

pedagogical learning, nor did they have opportunities to share their knowledge because their competing professional learning opportunities were during unpaid work hours.

The participants reported that teachers might seek leadership roles in the education system, while RECEs have fewer leadership opportunities in school settings.

Roles and Working Conditions

The teacher's role was to provide instruction while the RECE provided classroom management. Thus, according to Mary, RECEs were expected to work directly with the children while the teacher appeared to have greater flexibility within the roles and responsibilities. In addition, many of the after-school duties described by the RECEs included housekeeping duties.

The hours of work for each of the participants varied as well, with early entry and after instructional work hours. The RECEs indicated the fifteen minutes before and thirty minutes after the instructional day were considered planning time; teachers did not have to stay at school beyond the instructional day. However, one RECE indicated she and her partner allocated 20 minutes of planning time after school. Her teacher partner stayed after school and volunteered to support their work.

Communication Barriers Between Partners

RECEs perceived the teachers' role as having significant status. The participants added that RECEs were hired with the teacher's personality and roles and responsibilities in mind. Introductions between the classroom partners occurred on the first day of school. Awkward communication channels were hampered by a lack of common planning and breaktimes for the partners.

Lost in the Educational Professional Hierarchy

All of the participants indicated a professional hierarchy was evident in legislation, collective agreements and school cultures. The principal was the lead, then the

teachers, followed by support staff, including RECEs and EAs. According to two of the RECEs, their partners were invitational and the RECEs were treated like guests. One participant indicated teachers were asked to provide information about school protocols such as school routines, school culture, and access to human resources in the school and materials. RECEs interviewed believed they were excluded from entering an already established system. The three participants were frustrated that classroom space needed to be negotiated with the teacher. All the participants indicated teacher nameplates were displayed while RECEs were required to request a nameplate.

The office staff tended to ask for the teacher and not the RECE when disseminating and gathering information. Communication between administration, teachers, and families was well established, leaving the RECE to negotiate communication channels with families and administration. Mary spoke of being told what her job was daily by her teacher partner. She also recalled large amounts of time were devoted to the preparation of teaching materials after school without monetary compensation or lieu time. Mary also spoke being left alone with the children for long periods of time as the teacher did not return from breaks and lunches, made comments about the RECE's role in front of the children, and, in essence, treated the RECE like a child with few rights. Mary indicated:

I do all the planning and work on my own. There is no dialogue between what I am going to do and what she does. She has said that if I am teaching the circle then she doesn't have to be in the room. I'm not sure if I am supposed to take that as a compliment or if she just wants to leave me with the kids. I don't know. I don't think we're supposed to do that. She's just not there!

Mary recalled an implied hierarchy of classroom teacher and preparation teachers. Bill 242 highlights the RECE's role is to be present with the children at all times other than official break times.

Feelings of marginalization were reflected in the narratives of all the participants in the study. All three participants indicated they had used scheduled breaks to complete documentation of children's learning, further excluding themselves from professional conversations with their partners. The inability to attend Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) meetings (which identify student needs), parent-teacher conferences, and professional learning opportunities were all highlighted by the RECEs in the study. One of the participants stated, "I'm nothing! I don't get to be there! The parents think [the teacher] is the main person."

Informal exclusionary practices within school culture occurred according to the participants. Mary felt extremely disrespected when told she must sit at a different table than the teachers. She resented this practice not only because it disrespected RECEs and EAs, but because she was also a member of the Ontario College of Teachers.

The division of labour between the partners indicated a disproportionate delineation of tasks associated with professional roles and responsibilities. One of the participants noted when she confronted her partner about the inequitable representation of work, the teacher responded by demanding the RECE make a more significant contribution to creating classroom materials and left her alone with the children for more extended periods.

Despite these challenges, two participants indicated that they were happy with their partners and the work they engaged in daily. They were able to recall examples of their partners sharing information and asking for their feedback and knowledge. In one case, negotiating roles and responsibilities around the needs and strengths of students supported the partnership. In addition, negotiating roles and responsibilities based on knowledge, attitudes, and pedagogical decisions repositioned the partners as professionals. Collaborative decision-making about pedagogy provided a support system described by one of the RECE participants as a "family."

Review of Inter-professional Partnerships in Full-day Kindergarten 10 Years Later

The previous sections outlined findings from my thesis study. In this article I was also interested in examining how 10 years later the inter-professional partnership in FDK classrooms has changed or remained the same. This examination will draw on a small number of recent research studies (i.e. Langford et.al, 2016; Underwood et al.,2016) and on my own knowledge of and experiences with FDK partnerships as a member of an Ontario school community.

Ten years later, RECEs in FDK classrooms are still represented by different unions. RECEs, therefore, still do not have a collective voice to push for changes in their working conditions. During a job action in 2019, RECEs who are part of CUPE engaged in job action early in the school year and not at the same time as their partners who are part of different unions such as OECTA and ETFO. Engaging in job and strike action at different times created barriers to communication as the partners were not at school at the same time. RECEs had also not engaged in labour disruption nor strike action since coming to the school system. The RECEs were unfamiliar with protocols and procedures associated with labour action.

Current policies such as Bill 242 continue to define the roles and responsibilities of Registered Early Childhood Educators in schools and set out the division of labour between RECEs and teachers as cooperative rather than collaborative. RECEs continue to be excluded from recognition of their contributions to instructional practices. Anecdotally, I have observed parents contacting the teacher rather than the RECE about their children's academic progress in Kindergarten. I have heard parents call the RECE "the helper." According to Langford et al. (2016), RECEs continue to struggle to assert their roles through a play-based pedagogy and child development knowledge. Teachers continue to assert a dominant legal argument that they must meet curriculum expectations set in the Kindergarten program document.

Since I conducted my thesis study, the Kindergarten Program 2016 program document was introduced and highlighted the roles of 'the educators' (OME, 2016, p.112) within the front matter of the program document. This document asserts that "the hallmark of all successful partnerships is an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and open communication" (OME, 2016, p. 112). Yet, teachers continue to use paid preparation time to plan in isolation and set directions for programming excluding RECEs.

Ontario kindergarten teachers have historically written and signed report cards for kindergarten children twice a year and conferenced with parents throughout the school year. The Kindergarten Program (2016) states the role of the teacher in completing the reporting process explicitly. "The teacher ensures that the appropriate Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates are fully and properly completed and processed" (OME, 2016, p. 112). Currently, both teachers and RECEs collaborate on the writing of the report card but teachers continue to complete and sign reports cards. Teachers unlike RECEs have access to a Trillium software to write report cards. In 2018, RECEs' names were printed on the report cards but RECEs still do not provide a signature. The Kindergarten Communication of Learning: Initial Observations (2016) from the Ontario Ministry of Education formally recognized the name of the RECE on the report card as recognition of contributions to formal communication with parents of kindergarten children. RECEs are charged with observing, monitoring and assessing children's learning (OME, 2016, p. 19) found in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools, 2016*.

The word "support" continues to appear in descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of RECEs. Organized labour groups representing RECEs such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and OSSTF (Ontario Secondary School teachers federation) have a variety of members who represent support staff such as school administrative

assistants, custodians and education assistants. The designation of “support” in the case of RECEs means that they must be led by a knowledgeable other—the teacher—who has explicit roles and responsibilities related to decision making and leadership.

Teachers continue to be paid a yearly salary while RECEs are paid an hourly wage and impacted by lay off periods during the winter holidays and summer months. RECEs must be available for work during these lay off periods. Current RECE collective agreements still do not consider pay grids to reflect educational background or achievements such as completing professional development activities. This lack of recognition of professional development is highly problematic given that the College of Early Childhood Educators requires registered ECEs to complete annual professional learning to maintain membership. In contrast, OCTs are required to continue professional learning to move upward on the pay grid. Finally, it is important to note RECEs employed by school boards still have limited upward mobility in terms of accessing leadership positions at a school system level. Teachers may apply for leadership roles, including curriculum and administrative positions. Based on this examination of the FDK teacher/RECE partnership since 2013, it can be said that overall, some minor changes are evident but overall features of the partnership have remained the same.

Recommendations

To conclude, I offer some recommendations to address some of the issues with the FDK teacher/RECE partnership addressed in this article. At the institutional level, professional associations and pre-service educational institutions need to share responsibility, accessibility and course development of integrated professional learning for both OCTs and RECEs. In 2020, it became possible for RECEs to register for kindergarten additional qualifications through designated universities. Funding structures need to be in place to establish integrated learning opportunities with a focus on child development

and pedagogical approaches. Course work needs to recognize the contributions of RECEs and OCTs to a play-based literacy and numeracy curriculum. The course work can build a common curricula language for RECEs and OCTs, and develop joint understandings of pedagogical work in FDK classrooms.

RECEs and teachers of young children need to be represented as equal partners and thus need equitable wages and benefits based on qualifications and experiences. A wage grid is needed to represent the professional learning and education qualifications of RECEs. Leadership roles must be accessible to RECEs so that the contributions of early childhood education to the school system are recognized.

Both OCTs and RECEs need to have access to the provincial report card similar to preparation/itinerant teachers who are able to access the report cards and report to parents the achievement/growth of the children’s learning in a particular subject area.

Current collective agreements provide OCTs with preparation time during the instructional day. District school boards have begun the process of negotiating preparation time for RECEs outside of the instructional day. This proposed change, however, does not provide the RECE/OCT team with joint planning time. Schedules and timetables need to reflect common planning time for RECEs and OCTs to support pedagogical dialogue and programming. Current teacher collective agreements have guidelines for the number of minutes OCTs must supervise children while RECEs do not have any limitations on the number of minutes they must supervise children during nutrition breaks and before and after school supervision. A common approach for to these guidelines is necessary. Together, these recommendations will significantly improve the partnership of teachers and RECEs in Ontario full-day kindergarten classrooms and fulfil their promise first articulated 10 years ago.

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