



How does the Ontario Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care create professional learning opportunities that respond to educators' current training and experience?

Individuals who work in licensed child care centres in Ontario bring an array of educational training, lived experiences, and diverse knowledges to their everyday relationships with children and families. Often, the backgrounds and qualifications that program personnel hold are described through three categories according to the *Child Care and Early Years Act* (2014): people who are registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators, people who are approved by child care centre directors, and people who are neither registered early childhood educators (RECEs) nor approved by a director. As broad categories, these groupings reflect the range of training and experience that people working with children hold: RECEs have undertaken approved postsecondary education in ECE, while others are approved by a Ministry of Education official (directors) and others are hired into child care programs based on the particular experiences, skills, and programming abilities they contribute.

Weaving Insights from Literature

Since the early 2000s, reconceptualist early childhood education scholars have argued that deepening the educational and training experiences afforded to people working in the field is a critical strategy for intensifying the pedagogical character of early childhood education (Hodgins, Atkinson, & Wanamaker, 2017; Kummén & Hodgins, 2019; Moss, 2006; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Osgood, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015). Strengthening opportunities for developing and disseminating ECE knowledge, these scholars argue, bolsters the field on multiple structural and relational fronts: when educators' expertise is valued, the political complexities of their labour are better appreciated; when ECE is regarded as a complex and demanding undertaking instead of a technical or developmental practice, educational training and professional learning that deal in ethics, politics, democracy, and pedagogy become possible; when educators are afforded opportunities to engage in pedagogical thinking, they can more effectively grapple with the tangled pedagogical concerns they inherit with children (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss, 2014; Nxumalo, Vintimilla, & Nelson, 2018; Urban, Vandebroek, Van Laere, Lazzari, & Peeters, 2012; Vandebroek, Urban, & Peeters, 2016; Vintimilla, 2018). These connections between training, professional learning, and pedagogy are echoed in Urban and Swadener's (2016) contention that "competence in early childhood systems unfolds in relationships between individuals, institutions, and governance of the system, based on shared knowledge(s), practices, and values" (p. 14). This means that creating the conditions for professional learning and/as pedagogical collaboration requires shifting how we form relationships across the field (child-educator, educator-educator, educator-institution, educator-licensing, educator-society, society-child). That is, possibilities for thinking pedagogically in ECE are wholly entangled with complex systems of educator training, development, governance, and the histories and knowledges that educators bring to their everyday work. Therefore, the diverse training histories held by people working in licensed child care are of utmost consequence for developing a professional learning network relevant to Ontario.

Responding to the Ontario Context

According to the Ministry of Education (2018), 81% of supervisory roles and 62% of qualified employee roles are filled by RECEs (who bring a history of postsecondary ECE training). Concurrently, 19% of supervisors and 38% of qualified employees are approved by directors (and might hold other educational, professional, and experiential training histories). This means that on any given day, it is likely that both people who have and who have not completed postsecondary ECE training are collaborating together in pedagogical conversations alongside children and families.



Activating the Provincial Centre's Intentions

The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care asserts that a responsive, situated approach to professional learning must take seriously—and acknowledge the exceptional affordances of—a field where people do not necessarily hold similar formalized institutional professional training. Our pedagogist network model works toward ongoing professional learning that is situated, co-created, and meaningful to the particular children, families, and adults within a program. Pedagogists work in close collaboration with program staff to co-create sustainable professional learning dialogues grounded in pedagogical thinking. As pedagogists attend to the relationships and questions that matter to situated programs, they create possibilities for relational professional learning that values the multitude of perspectives, histories, and knowledges present in a space. Answering to the current ECE landscape in Ontario, pedagogists do not rely on an assumption of common educational training histories, nor do they cater only to those with certain levels of training. Instead, our professional learning network supports people who have various trajectories of coming to, contributing to, and shaping the collective work of supporting children and families in licensed child care, home child care, before- and after-school child care, authorized recreation, supported special resource child care, and EarlyON programs. Pedagogical work, we argue, is in constant conversation with overarching educational and governmental systems, and requires dispositions, critical collaborations, and collective reimaginations that can be supported in educational training programs and that are also cultivated by careful and creative individuals with diverse histories.

References

- Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hodgins, B. D., Atkinson, K., & Wanamaker, L. (2017). (Re)imagining and (re)engaging in relational encounters: Communities of practice for (re)vitalizing pedagogies. *ECElink*, 1(1), 22–34.
- Kummen, K., & Hodgins, B. D. (2019). Learning collectives with/in sites of practice: Beyond training and professional development. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 44(1), 111–122. doi:10.18357/jcs.v44i1.18785
- Moss, P. (2006). Structures, understandings, and discourses: Possibilities for re-envisioning the early childhood worker. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(1), 30–41.
- Moss, P. (2014). *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Moss, P., & Petrie, P. (2002). *From children's services to children's spaces*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Nxumalo, F., Vintimilla, C. D., & Nelson, N. (2018). Pedagogical gatherings in early childhood education: Mapping interferences in emergent curriculum. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(4), 433–453. doi:10.1080/03626784.2018.1522930
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2018). *Ontario's early years and child care annual report 2018*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/EarlyYearsChildCareAnnualReport2018.pdf>
- Osgood, J. (2010). Reconstructing professionalism in ECEC: The case for the "critically reflective emotional professional." *Early Years*, 30(2), 119–133.
- Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Nxumalo, F., Kocher, L., Elliot, E., & Sanchez, A. (2015). *Journeys: Reconceptualizing early childhood practices through pedagogical narration*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Urban, M., & Swadener, B. B. (2016). Democratic accountability and contextualised systemic evaluation. A comment on the OECD initiative to launch an International Early Learning Study (IELS). *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal*, 5(1), 6–18.
- Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Van Laere, K., Lazzari, A., & Peeters, J. (2012). Toward competent systems in early childhood education and care: Implications for policy and practice. *European Journal of Education*, 47(4), 508–526.
- Vandenbroeck, M., Urban, M., & Peeters, J. (Eds.) (2016). *Pathways to professionalism in early childhood education and care*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Vintimilla, C. D. (2018). Encounters with a pedagogista. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 19(1), 20–30. doi:10.1177/1463949116684886