



## How many pedagogists will the Ontario Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care support?

The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care offers a vision for ongoing professional learning that builds a sustainable province-wide network of pedagogists in Ontario. Pedagogists, who hold pedagogical leadership roles in their communities, will support educators to amplify their pedagogical thinking in everyday practice as they activate the foundations of learning offered in *How Does Learning Happen?* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Key to the role of a pedagogist is the ability and opportunity to cultivate meaningful long-term pedagogical relationships with people who work directly with children and families. These collaborative pedagogical relationships cannot be formed or understood separate from the unique geographical, population, funding, training, and regulatory conditions present in the ECE sector. This means that in building the network, the Provincial Centre must develop a pedagogist allocation model capable of both (1) emphasizing the importance of pedagogists and educators working in close collaboration and (2) providing democratic and equitable access to professional learning. Accordingly, the Provincial Centre utilizes a systematic data- and literature-informed approach to distributing pedagogists throughout the province. Over the next 10 years, 1000+ pedagogists will be needed to work with Ontario's early childhood educators. The Provincial Centre will work toward training and supporting one pedagogist for approximately every 50 program staff. Informed by data from the Ontario Ministry of Education's Child Care Licensing System (2018a) as well as the Licensed Child Care Operations Survey (2018b), the Provincial Centre is working toward supporting more than 1000 pedagogists who will engage with educators in licensed child care, home child care, before- and after-school child care, authorized recreation, supported special resource child care, and EarlyON programs. This 1:50 ratio, as well as the decision to calculate this ratio based on the number of program staff, is grounded in a precise political orientation that values the educator-pedagogist relationship and is bolstered by salient literature on the role of a pedagogical facilitator (Kummen & Hodgins, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Hodgins, 2017).

### Weaving Insights from Literature

Drawing on insights from a 12-year pedagogist network pilot project in British Columbia (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006; reports available at <http://www.veronicapacineketchabaw.com/reports>), Pacini-Ketchabaw and Hodgins (2017) contend that creating and sustaining a high-quality, locally relevant culture of pedagogically oriented professional learning requires that pedagogists continually meet with educators, frequently visit the sites where local programs unfold, and maintain an ongoing dialogue with educators. Reporting on the BC pedagogist network pilot project, Hodgins, Atkinson, and Wanamaker (2017) position communities of practice and pedagogical collaboration "as an imperative for vital—essential and lively—pedagogies" (p. 23). Vintimilla (2018) integrates insights from her work as a pedagogista in Canada to argue that provoking an ethos of complicated conversations, whereby educators and pedagogists put taken-for-granted practices at risk as they trace the consequences of, and possibilities for, their images of children, curriculum, educators, and democratic society is central to the role of a pedagogist. Insights from small- and large-scale internationally pedagogically oriented educator-action projects provide further evidence of the critical importance of collective thinking, pedagogical conversation, and public participation toward situated, vibrant, and valued early childhood education practice (Lenz Taguchi, 2010; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2008; Moss, 2014; Olsson, 2009). Taken together, these studies of research-practice initiatives articulate a clear link between critically reflective educator-pedagogist pedagogical conversations and the educator's propensity and ability to construct responsive, innovative pedagogies that respond to the children and families they work with (Kummen & Hodgins, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliott, & Sanchez, 2015).

Importantly, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Hodgins (2017) locate the educator-pedagogist relationship amid a collection of relations that shape early years practice. When educator-pedagogist relationships facilitate meaningful pedagogical reflection, educators are better able to build collegial pedagogical networks and are supported to make their pedagogical innovations visible to the children, families, and communities they work with. This is consistent with reconceptualist early childhood education scholars who position the role of the 21st-century educator as deeply



entangled with local ethics and politics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Langford, 2010; Nxumalo, Vintimilla, & Nelson, 2018; Osgood, 2010). Professional learning relationships are never isolated from the realities children and families inherit. This means that, in working toward a vision of equitable, collective, democratic early childhood education in Ontario, educators hold a responsibility to engage in pedagogical thinking with colleagues, families, children, communities, and pedagogists; pedagogists are accountable to inviting intentional and ethical pedagogical innovation in relationship with educators and communities; and professional learning networks must support the educator-pedagogist relationship as an important space for critical dialogue.

## Responding to the Ontario Context

In describing the scope and character of the child care sector from 2017 to 2018, the Ministry of Education (2018c) reports that there are 5,437 licensed child care centres and 427,032 licenced child care spaces in infant, toddler, preschool, kindergarten, school age, and family age programs in the province. Reporting on the number of centres and licensed spaces affords an understanding of the growth and breadth of the child care community and allows for an appreciation of the quality assurance, regulatory, and systems-level health of the field. As the Provincial Centre begins to distribute pedagogists, we want to emphasize factors beyond quality assurance and regulatory criteria for quantifying and anticipating how our professional learning network can best respond to the current landscape of ECE in Ontario.

In Fall 2018, the Secretariat for Ontario's three Centres of Excellence surveyed service manager directors or representatives across the province to gain a better understanding of how professional learning currently unfolds within the field (please see Jobb & Montpetit, 2019, for a report). Results showed that in the current early childhood landscape, geographical, population, funding, and organizational conditions mean that some staff in some areas sometimes have different access to professional learning than their colleagues in other areas. Factors including the size and influence of program providers, structural capability to embed pedagogical support staff within municipal systems, existing relationships with external professional development providers, and the ability to travel to urban centres or access funding for professional learning differentially shape the professional learning climate in the province. How, and why, the Provincial Centre allocates pedagogists must therefore address the multifaceted complexities that currently inform professional development throughout the province.

## Activating the Provincial Centre's Intentions

Relevant to the Provincial Centre's pedagogist model approach to professional learning, the 1:50 pedagogist to staff ratio has two key intentions, as detailed below: it (1) foregrounds the importance of the pedagogist-educator relationship and (2) works toward proportionate, attainable access to professional learning for educators.

1. In response to the literature that emphasizes the importance of ongoing, sustainable professional learning relationships in supporting pedagogical collaborations, our approach to understanding the distribution of pedagogists is based on the number of program staff who work in ratio in programs and who are in everyday relationships with children and families. This means that our distribution of pedagogists must respond to the exact share of staff within precise programs and in specific communities, rather than being predicated on the number of centres or licensed child care spaces.
2. Guided by qualitative responses provided by service provider directors in a survey administered by the Provincial Centre, we foreground the importance of equitable and democratic access to pedagogists for all program staff. Our pedagogist distribution model, then, needs to be founded on a measure that represents those who most readily participate in the educator-pedagogist professional learning relationship: program staff. Furthermore, by calculating our pedagogist distribution to align with the number of program staff, we intend to overtly centre the role of the educator (and not the organizational or governance structure they work within) in thinking pedagogically. Our assertion is that while the entire ECE system has a role to play in amplifying the pedagogical character of the field, we take seriously the rich contribution that educators will make to this project.



## References

- Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2013). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hodgins, B. D., Atkinson, K., & Wanamaker, L. (2017). (Re)imagining and (re)engaging in relational encounters: Communities of practice for (re)vitalizing pedagogies. *ECELink: Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario*, 1(1), 22–34.
- Jobb, C., & Montpetit, M. (2019). *Research brief: Insights from CMSMs and DSSABs*. Secretariat for the Centres of Excellence. Retrieved from [http://bit.ly/ResearchBrief\\_1](http://bit.ly/ResearchBrief_1)
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs.v44i1.18785>
- Langford R. (2010). Critiquing child-centered pedagogy to bring children and early childhood educators into the centre of a democratic pedagogy. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 11(1), 113–127.
- Lenz-Taguchi, H. (2010). *Going beyond the theory/practice divide in early childhood education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- MacNaughton, G., & Hughes, P. (2008). *Doing action research In early childhood studies: A step-by-step guide*. London, UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Moss, P. (2014). *Transformative change and real utopias in early childhood education: A story of democracy, experimentation, and potentiality*. London, UK: Routledge.
- 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
- Olsson, L. M. (2009). *Movement and experimentation in young children's learning: Deleuze and Guattari in early childhood education*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *How does learning happen? Ontario's pedagogy for the early years*. Queen's Printer of Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/howlearninghappens.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2018a). *Child care licensing system* [data file].
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2018b). *Reference guide for Ontario licensed child care operations survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/pdfs/SurveyReferenceGuide.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2018c). *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., & Hodgins, B. D. (2017). *The community early learning and child care facilitators pilot project: Year six evaluation report*. Retrieved from <http://www.veronicapacineketchabaw.com/reports/>
- Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Nxumalo, F., Kocher, L., Elliott, E., & Sanchez, A. (2015). *Journeys: Reconceptualizing early childhood education practices through pedagogical narration*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Pence, A., & Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. (2006). The investigating "quality" project: Challenges and possibilities for Canada. *Interaction*, 20(3), 11–13.
- Vintimilla, C. D. (2018). Encounters with a pedagogista. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 19(1), 20–30. doi:10.1177/1463949116684886