

Early Childhood Development Association of PEI

# Final Research Report

**What Happened to Everything I Learned in College?  
Examining experienced early childhood educator's ideas  
about professionalism in PEI**

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## **Executive Summary**

Despite common policy changes in a growing number of countries to raise quality and visibility of early years services through the introduction of national curricular frameworks (Oberhuemer, 2013; OECD, 2011), conceptualizations of early childhood professionals remain distinctly variegated (Harwood, Klopper, Oberhuemer, 2005; Osanyin, & Vanderlee, 2012). Recent research suggests that there has been a heightened shift in the expectations of early childhood educators qualifications and education with an increasing emphasis on the ability to be creative within a play-based pedagogy, and to situate their practice within 21st century theoretical frameworks that early childhood educators did not learn about in training (Kilderry, 2014). There is a suggestion that since significant policy changes and perceived shift in demands on educators in Prince Edward Island, educators may be experiencing severe imposter syndrome leading to feelings of uncertainty about their profession (Bruno, Gonzalez-Mena, Hernandez, & Sullivan, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this project was to (a) conduct a thorough research review of the topic; (b) to unpack the professional experiences that seasoned educators in the field have had as a result of this policy shift over the past ten years in PEI; and (c) to explore notions of professionalism and early childhood education and care in the 21st century.

## **Background and Literature Review**

### **Literature Search**

The data for the literature review was gathered from over 87 peer-reviewed journal articles and books published between the years 1998-2016. These were retrieved from National Ministries across Canada, EBSCO, ERIC, and Google Scholar using over 15 different terms related to professionalism, leadership, and the early childhood learning field. Studies were eligible in this review for consideration if a) they were studies written in the context of early childhood (0-8); and b) were focused on policy, practice, and professionalism in the early learning field.

### **21st Century Early Learning Movements**

Early learning and child care (ELCC) systems policy and practice have undergone great transformation, both locally and internationally (Flanagan, 2010, 2012; Goffin, 2013; Oberhuemer, 2013; OECD, 2011). Despite common policy growth and changes in a growing number of countries to raise the quality and visibility of early years services through the introduction of national curricular frameworks (OECD, 2001; Oberhuemer, 2003; Bennett, 2004; Blenkin, Rose, & Yue, 2007; Burgess & Fleet, 2009), conceptualisations of early childhood professionals remain distinctly variegated (Oberhuemer, 2005). In addition, the language associated with the ELCC system has also seen great advances, including terminology associated with the trained professionals working in the system: Babysitter to Provocative Protagonist, Daycare Worker to Catalytic Agent, and Educator to Mediator and Facilitator (Edwards & Gandini, 2015). Early learning curriculum frameworks have also become embedded into the 21st century learning movement (Oberhuemer, 2013; OECD, 2011), creating a shift in professional

deliverables and system expectations. “Never has more been expected of ECEs” (Goffin, 2013, p. 42).

### **Designs of Play Pedagogy and Early Learning and Care**

Key terms associated with early learning frameworks and system evolution tend to be built on the importance of scaffolding children’s learning (Bedrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978) and the importance of loose parts (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2014), intentionality (Connor, 2010; Coople & Bredekamp, 2009; Epstein, 2007; Spodek & Saracho, 2014; Thomas, Warren, & deVries, 2011), reflection (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; MacNaughton, 2005; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009), observation (Carr, 2011; NAEYC, 2009), documentation (Carr & Lee, 2012; Drummond, 2016; Katz, 2014; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius, 2014; Mallaguzzi, 1994; Rinaldi, 1998; Seitz, 2008; Shores & Grace, 2005), and children’s self-initiated actions and interests (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Wein & Stacey, 2008). Cornerstone to this evolution is the push to create environments and relationships that inspire children to experiment, make choices, and guide their own learning. This challenges the more traditional, teacher-directed training many educators had received in their post-secondary education a decade or more ago, and it has created a silent confusion among these educators in Prince Edward Island (PEI). Observational data indicates that educators in PEI began silently navigating the new terms and expectations of the 21st century system. In many cases, educators confessed that they had set aside practices they used to have great confidence in (e.g. circle time, work jobs, group snack, themes), as they now felt like these practices were “dirty words of daycare,” (coined by the Executive Director of the ECDA) and as a result, they belonged in the “old world”!

Subsequently, the Early Childhood Development Association partnered with an Early Learning Researcher and two PhD students from the University of Prince Edward Island UPEI to design a

deliver a workshop series to support these educators in reflective practice; and to formally document the process through a research study.

### **Raising Quality in Early Childhood Education and Imposter Syndrome**

Recent research suggests that there has been a heightened shift in the expectations of early childhood educator's qualifications and education with an increasing emphasis on the ability to be creative within a play-based pedagogy and to situate their practice within 21st Century theoretical frameworks that they perhaps were not exposed to throughout their certificate or degree training (Goffin, 2013). Given the significant policy change and perceived shift in demands on educators working in the PEI ELCC system, the assumption of this work is that some educators may be experiencing imposter phenomenon (Bruno, Gonzalez-Mena, Hernandez, & Sullivan, 2013; Vergauwe, Wille, Feyes, Fruyt, & Anseel, 2014) and uncertainty about their practice. Imposter phenomenon refers to the intense feelings of intellectual fraudulence, often experienced by high-achieving individuals (Vergauwe, et al., 2014).

### **Professionalism and Early Childhood Educators in PEI**

In attempts to raise quality and visibility in the early years both locally and nationally, the occupation of being an early childhood educator (ECE) was starting to be talked about as a "profession" not just an occupation. Campaigns like [\*Start with Play\*](#) in PEI articulated ECEs as early childhood professionals, and that early learning is important, and ultimately it happens through play. A cultural shift began to happen in PEI. There were numerous political and public platforms by which early childhood learning and care were being discussed and this type of dialogue puts system change on many people's agendas. Families, early childhood educators, community advocates, policy and decision makers, and academics were discussing early childhood education and care and they were receiving messages like those in the *Start with Play*

campaign at the local movie theatres. ECE's were being reaffirmed, "you are professionals." In addition, there were policy changes that happened that were political in nature. For example, when PEI's Government moved the community based kindergarten system to the public school system, it required all kindergarten teachers to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree (if they did not already have one); created additional certification and training opportunities for ECEs to obtain two year diplomas; implemented a wage scale and increase for ECEs in Early Years Centres, and commissioned the creation of an Early Learning Framework. In the United States, the National Research Council (2001) recommended that all early childhood teachers have bachelor degrees (Bogard, Taylor, & Takaishi, 2008; Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales, 2010; Early, et al., 2006; Whitebook, 2003). Yet, as Goffin (2013) articulates, "while formally acquired degrees and/or credentials are important to organized fields of practice, degrees and certifications by themselves do not denote professionalism" (p. 36). Researchers wondered in this project, if this would also be the case.

### **What does being a professional really mean?**

According to the literature, professional can be defined as: committing to a job well done; being a good employee; providing a reliable, competent service; getting paid for what you do; just plain good (Goffin, 2013). Traditionally, professionals were individuals who pursued a learned art in the spirit of public service – only incidentally did they view it as a means to secure a livelihood. Consequently, "professions have long been understood to be moral endeavors, demanding moderation on personal interests in order to provide beneficent service to others" (Wineberg, 2008, as cited by Feeney, 2012, p. 4).

## **An Occupation as a Profession**

Feeney (2013) denotes that there are eight criteria to determine if an occupation is a profession: (1) a specialized body of knowledge and expertise, (2) prolonged training, (3) rigorous requirements for entry to training and eligibility to practice, (4) standards of practice, (5) commitment to serving a significant social value, (6) recognition as the *only* group who can perform a function, (7) autonomy, and (8) a code of ethics.

There is *professionalism as individual practice*, which both Feeney (2012) and Goffin (2013) discuss in the field of early childhood education and care. Feeney asserts there are five ways or areas that individuals can demonstrate the ideals and principals of professionalism in their daily work with children. The first area, *Knowledge and Skills* (p. 35), addresses the specialized body of knowledge and skills that characterize the unique contributions to society that ECEs make. Specialized knowledge and skills are very often the “hallmark” of a profession and are at the heart of their contribution to society (Goffin, 2013; Hordern, 2014). The second area is called, *Behaving like a Professional* (p. 58), and this hones in on communication and relationship skills, work ethic, and professional codes of ethics. *Personal Attributes* (p. 74) is the third area, and this identifies the personal qualities that are such a critically important part of the ECE. The fourth area is all about *Doing Your Best for Young Children* (p. 86), which is all about discovering your calling, being a life-long learner, a reflective practitioner, and having plans to always be a learner through your own professional development plan.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this project was to unpack the professional notions and experiences that seasoned educators in the field have had as a result of many policy shifts and system change over the past ten years in PEI; and to explore notions of professionalism and early childhood

education and care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The literature also asserts that “given the upheavals early childhood education has experienced in 200 years of history, field altering change is not an anomaly” (Griffin, 2013, p. xvii;). Dramatic change is not new to the profession (Ebbeck & Clyde, 1988; Hayes, 2010)., however, we wanted to ask some specific questions targeting some of these notions in PEI; but also highlighting professionalism in this research. Therefore, **the research questions** were inspired by Goffin’s work (2013) and were framed in terms of the past, present and future of early childhood professionalism in PEI:

1. What is the same and what is different in practice since the implementation of PEIPEI?
2. How has the recent policy shift either professionalized practice or confused practitioners?
3. What is early childhood educators (with 10+ years of experience) definition of professionalism?
4. What do they see as opportunities in professional growth for the future? What do they need in terms of support to be the best they can be?

### **Theoretical Approach**

#### **Professional Learning Communities**

This project was informed by socio-cultural theories of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that suggest that creating learning communities is a useful way to promote professional learning (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). This study taps into similar theories of professional learning that suggest that professional learning must be relevant, context based, and have a practical focus to be effective (McGregor, Hooker, Wise, & Devlin, 2010). In addition, research suggests learning communities have additional benefits, such as a revived sense of positive professional identity

and a decrease in feelings of isolation (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Roach O'Keefe & Moffatt, 2013).

### **Funds of Knowledge**

Seasoned teachers (with > 10 years in the field) bring funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) to their practice that is a mosaic of their education from many years ago combined with practical experience from working in the field. There is also research to suggest that sometimes the highest of achievers may experience imposter phenomenon (Vergauwe, Wille, Feyes, De Fruyt, & Anseel, 2014).

These theories suggest that the experience from this practical short-term learning community may be useful in helping educators recognize and acknowledge their funds of knowledge, embrace their professionalism and responsibility to it, and perhaps enable a release from the paralyzation that might have occurred in the recent years of policy shift in PEI.

## **Methods**

### **Data Generation**

This research employed a qualitative research method. Data was generated for analysis in two phases: (1) through a professional learning workshop where an interview matrix (see Appendix A) was used to gather a large amount of information from participants in a short amount of time; build dialogue, and explore notions of professionalism and funds of knowledge; (2) using the results from the interview matrix, an in-depth interview protocol was developed (see Appendix B) and conducted with 11/12 educators using purposive sampling. Member checking occurred twice, after each phase (see Figure 1. Methodological Process) and an

opportunity for key stakeholders was held to share preliminary findings<sup>1</sup>. Analysis includes a content and thematic analysis (Babbie, 2010; Neuendorf, 2017) for information gleaned from the interview matrix, in-depth interviews, as well as the researchers' field notes and journals.

### **Figure 1. Methodological Process**



### **Researcher Field Notes**

Researchers also made detailed and descriptive field notes and journal entries concerning their observations, reactions, direct quotations, insights, inspirations, and questions (Patton, 2014), before and promptly after the workshop. These field notes will serve as very important and essential data for data analysis.

### **Site population and selection**

After UPEI REB approval (see Appendix C), an invitation was communicated to participants who are taking part in a professional development workshop series with the Executive Director of the ECDA. Initial data collection occurred at the first workshop; and interested participants were invited to follow up with an in-depth interview approximately three months later. Researchers made best attempts at purposive sampling in order to garner a wide variety of perspectives from ECE's representing Prince, Queens, Kings counties across PEI; Aboriginal centres; rural centres; French centres; infant educators; preschool educators; Special Needs Assistants; directors; male & female; mixed age grouping (all with > 10 years in the field). It was the aim to recruit approximately 12 educators for these interviews; and 11 educators

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<sup>1</sup> Stakeholders included members of the PEI Department of Education, Early Childhood Learning and Culture, Holland College Early Childhood Education and Care Faculty, Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. , and The Board of Directors of the Early Childhood Development Association.

ended up participating. These methods of recruitment have proven to be effective means in recent research endeavors in Prince Edward Island (Gabriel, Doiron, Baldaccino, McKenna, & Roach O’Keefe, 2012; Moffatt & Roach O’Keefe, 2013).

### **Description of Participants**

Participants included 11 female early childhood educators. Their length of experience in the field ranged from eight<sup>2</sup> to thirty-four years and varied from public and private centres. Their current work experiences were also varied; some worked in Early Years Centres, and some worked in private licensed centres. They brought expertise and viewpoints from those of infant, preschool, and mixed age grouping educators. They represented all three counties: Kings, Queens, and Prince counties across PEI.

Note: All participants will be identified in the following section by their pseudonym.

## **Findings**

### **The Dirty Words of Daycare**

For the purpose of the study, dirty words were defined as those that described as the educational strategies that they had set aside, and that they used to have great confidence in, but felt that they were no longer best practice or acceptable practices (for whatever reason) in their field. When asked for the words that they defined as “dirty words of daycare” during the workshop and interviews, the following (Figure 2. Dirty Words of Daycare) were included.

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the aim to recruit those with 10+ years experience.

Figure 2. Dirty Words of Daycare



They discussed that words and practices like “circle-time” was something they all enjoyed, reading to children, and being together as a group. However, with the new curriculum framework in the early years, and the perceived movement to play-based, emergent curriculum, they were left wondering if circle time was acceptable practice, and were often challenged by their early years mentor about pedagogical decisions they had made. Many voiced that they thought group time (like circle time) was important, but wondered how it fit with child-led practices and the child’s ability to choose which experiences to engage in. Others spoke of throwing out their theme boxes (these were defined as totes or boxes full of items, props, books, etc. that they would use on particular themes, like “apples” in September) and in turn, throwing out the idea of doing themes at all. However, after “tossing the baby out with the bathwater”, they said they were left feeling a bit lost, and confused with what they were “supposed to be doing” now (Participant Cassie).

Kindergarten-readiness was also a contentious word for participants. “I think that there is such an immense pressure on families and parents to have their children prepared for whatever their next step is, whether it’s kindergarten and then grade 1 and then prepare for... and so I feel like it’s a dirty word because it creates and causes stress within families, for educators, for society, you know?” (Participant Paige).

## What is Professionalism?

“We’re recognized more professionally than babysitters. That’s a bad word! There’s more recognition that without childcare, people can’t work. Without work, the economy is worse than it is now” (Participant Tammy). Participants discussed what professionalism meant to them. They noted six ideas about what described professionalism: (1) **presentation** was important: attire, dress, someone well-spoken, upholding yourself high, (2) that there were **high standards** in their field, providing the best care to the child and the family, working to the best of their ability, (3) **education and training** were important, in addition to qualifications and that there were knowledgeable people in the field (contrary to Goffin’s earlier claim that it does not denote a profession), (4) **respect**, being respected and respectful in their work with children and families, being respected, needed, and recognized by families and society, (5) **policies and early learning frameworks** to support their work in the field, and (6) **values** that one holds as an ECE: patience, tolerance, thoughtfulness, honesty, reliable, and dedicated being a few in particular that they mentioned.

## Experiencing System Change

System change (e.g. Kindergarten leaving the early childhood system in PEI; the Early Learning Framework) was something that many participants wove into their discussions in both the workshop and the interviews. There were various reactions to change articulated by participants. They acknowledged that there were both positive and negative reactions to the change: some people embraced it and engaged in it as an opportunity for growth in their career and some had a hard time reconciling past learning with new expectations. They noted that change was “ok” for those who were flexible and open-minded; and that it was time to either “step up or step back” (Participant Anna) when Kindergarten left the system. They spoke about

the “loss” of kindergarten as a crisis to themselves, so much so that it was a recurring discussion throughout the project.

They also articulated that change came with a set of positive things for the early childhood profession. They said that they thought there was a growing respect in PEI for ECEs (by parents, community, and government officials) because of the new policy changes, and renewed spotlight that was put on the early childhood field.

**More about kindergarten: Loss, grief, and readiness.**

The discussion about kindergarten was a sub-theme under the umbrella of change in the profession that has occurred in the PEI system over the past decade. Participants discussed the process of how and when Kindergarten was moved from the community based system into the public school system. “The first step was the excellence initiative, as far as the government goes. I think they took away with one hand and gave with the other during that time. When kindergarten went into the school system, it sucked all of the certified early childhood educators that were there with it, pretty much out of the whole sector” (Participant Holly).

They felt a grave loss: loss of staff (kindergarten teachers) in their centres, loss of their mentors, and loss of their friends and co-workers in their professional lives. They remembered it being publicly stated many times, that “the best of the best [ECEs]” moved on to teach kindergarten in the public school system. They recalled that these educators were indeed wonderful, and they missed them dearly. They were grieving the loss of these professionals. They also felt anger, stating that when kindergarten left the early childhood sector, “it was a slap in the face professionally... I don’t know the ins and outs of it, but the bottom line, my assumption was that the government would rather put the money into the school system instead of here, where we need it” (Participant Lesley). Educators discussed that while there were

programs put in place (“the Golden Carrot”) for the kindergarten teachers to obtain their degree, and the uncertified staff left in the system to obtain their 90-hour certification and/or diplomas, that they were the ones left holding it (the sector) together and no-one thanked them for staying. Many of the participants also spoke about the fact that they stayed to teach in the early childhood sector because they wanted to, because they loved what they did and were good at it.

### **Schoolification.**

Schoolification was a term that participants discussed in connection with kindergarten leaving their system and going to another. Schoolification is a term associated with readiness (Ministry of Education, 2012a, 2012b, 2013), and it is early childhood educator’s ability to articulate their specialized bank of knowledge that will reverse this. The term is

associated with an increasing national and global emphasis of early childhood education and care system as predominantly preparation for academic school success with the child as an economic resource, manifested in assessment and policy initiatives that are underpinned with economically driven and narrowly construed views of cognition and learning (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013 as cited in Alcock & Haggerty, 2013, p. 21).

This means the increased focus seems to be more on academic learning and less about developmentally appropriate practice that is a result of certain policies (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014). The participants spoke about how they perceive a shift in parents’ and society’s expectation of children, and that kindergarten-readiness (one of their dirty words) seemed to be a focus of late; and that this was causing stress, and also threatening their own professional pedagogy about how young children learn.

## **Documentation.**

Participants also talked about the pedagogical documentation as something that they valued, they felt was rewarding (to see the evolution of the child), and helped them scaffold learning. They also recounted that the perceived increased pressure to document (and assess) everything was taking away from the enjoying the experience with the child (e.g. they spoke about their feeling that they needed to take notes, take more pictures, etc.). They also spoke about the frustration they felt with “the more kids, the more difficult it is” with limited time to complete binders (portfolios) for each child, and that the quality and thought and effort that they wanted to put into it was limited because of the volume of children and amount of documentation that they felt was required. They also were thwarted when they created documentation of children’s learning for families when “parents didn’t looking at the documentation binders... I’m disappointed by this” (Participant Jane).

Participants also spoke of the pressure to prove their professionalism (we are really teaching!) through their practice of documentation, “documentation and tying it back to the ELF to see that they’re actually learning. I know the parents want structure over play because when they think of play they think we’re just babysitting and we’re just housing the children” (Participant Cassie).

## Current State of the Field

Participants discussed the strengths and the limitations of the current state of the early childhood field in PEI. The figure below (Figure 3. Current State) summarizes some of the themes from their discussions.

**Figure 3. Current State**



## Suggestions for their Profession's Growth

Participants also articulated what they needed to continue advancing their profession as early childhood educators, and what they wanted or needed to continue in their own professional journey. Figure 4. Suggestions for Professional Growth summarizes their requests for advocacy efforts in the early childhood field in order to continue to professionalize the sector.

**Figure 4. Suggestions for Professional Growth**



**Advocacy for:**

- **Matching Professional Expectations with Resources**
  - More planning time; Subs to allow ECEs to plan and document
- **Improved Communication with Resources**
  - Provide better communication about referral process for special need supports
- **Leverage technology better in the EC system**
  - Use social media to connect with parents
- **Teacher Parity Professionally**
  - Flu shots for free for educators (teachers get them free)
  - Close EYCs with school (e.g., storm)
- **Professional Development**
  - More workshops (like the one we just did)
  - Incentives for higher education (subsidies, bursaries)
  - EC mentors and supports with specialized leadership and education to support ECEs
- **Financial Support**
  - Grants for computer purchase if documentation as assessment is required
  - We are still buying supplies with our own dollars!
  - Continued lobbying from ECDA

## **Discussion**

### **Imposter Syndrome and Professional Confidence**

There was evidence in the transcripts and through the multiple discussions through the course of this project that there are both educators who feel confident in their profession, but also those who are struggling with imposter syndrome. The persistent confusion about what is expected of them and feeling like they are fraudulent in their practice somehow underlies much of their frustration about the current state of their profession in PEI (Verguawe, et al., 2014). Interestingly, those with less than ten years experience clearly articulated their confidence, and this warrants further examination with a larger population to investigate whether this is the case amongst many.

Additionally, educators discussed many of Feeney's (2013) *professionalism as individual practice*, however, they did not mention the specialized body of knowledge and skills as a characteristic; nor did they discuss this at any other point in the workshops, member-checking, or interviews with researchers. This illuminates a glaring requirement to provide a foundation of language about this in post-secondary training, in-services, and professional development opportunities that will support these early childhood educators in their ability to articulate what they do and why they do it; to articulate their pedagogy and specialized competencies that demonstrate their expertise and professionalism.

### **Resilience and Workplace Wellness**

“Resilience has often been defined as the ability to bounce back in times of adversity and to develop in a positive way when faced with setbacks” (Dillen, 2012; Masten, 2009, as cited in Petty, 2014). The grief, anger, and sadness that educators were feeling amidst change in their profession over the last decade align with the stages of grief according to the Kubler Ross model:

denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The voice of frustration with the changes over the past decade signals a need for those who can support them, to respond with provision, or help. The voice of resilience about acceptance of change, willingness to grow and learn needs to be championed, and there are opportunities here for mentoring within the sector like never before. Decision makers need to pay attention to this, as early childhood educators' psychological wellbeing at work depends on their feelings of autonomy, and without it, they are at risk of becoming un-well (Royer & Moreau, 2015). In addition, mental health in the workplace is important, for childcare centres to be the healthy, safe, and exciting places they are intended to be. In order to nurture and foster good mental health in children, their caregivers need to be nurtured and practice self-care as research asserts the personal and professional self are intertwined (Anderson, 2014; Sumison, 2004; Osgood, 2012). Educator's lack of intrinsic motivation (which will be discussed in subsequent section) and imposter syndrome can also be linked to burn out in professions (Gu & Day, 2007). Research also indicates that factors that contribute to employee resilience and enable them to thrive include: good professional mentorship that works toward building each other up; collegiality/ supporting each other and celebrating each other's expertise and the success/ professional importance they demonstrate every day; recognition by others of their professional expertise; and a commitment to ongoing learning and self insight (Sumison, 2004). Employer support to create such an environment results in educators feeling increased autonomy, healthier, more motivated to be engaged in their work (AACCN, 2016; Baumgartner, DiCarlo, & Apavaloaie, 2011; Sumison, 2004; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007) and in turn, be useful in the recruitment and retention of quality early childhood educators through decreased perceived stress (Wagner et al., 2012). In addition, through continued collaborative learning communities, early childhood educators can build

resilience and develop an awareness of their “emotional responses as one of their many ways of knowing, and using the power of emotion as a basis of collective and individual social resistance, teachers can sort their experiences, their anxieties, their fears, their excitements and learn how to use them in empowering ways” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 231).

### **Extrinsic vs Intrinsic Motivation: Doing Your Best for Young Children**

“No one thanked us for staying” (Participant Cassie). Educators voiced their desire to remain firmly rooted in the early childhood sector after the changes in kindergarten and the Prince Edward Island Preschool Excellence Initiative. They talked about already discovering their calling (as Feeney, 2013 calls it) and having plans to grow and learn. However, this comment amongst others reflects a professional motivation that is extrinsic in nature. Many of the educators spoke of having an early childhood mentor of some kind who they relied on to tell them if they were doing something right or not (e.g. how they implement new curriculum). This is not uncommon when the dominant construction of ‘professionalism’ has been created through government policy, and as a result, they perceive facing a potential Foucauldian regulatory gaze (Osgood, 2006).

They also articulated having wanted some kind of recognition about their practice. While it is not unusual to want such recognition, especially after they viewed it being given to others (kindergarten teachers, uncertified staff who were going back to school); they relied on this external recognition to provide them with the professional sustenance of confidence they were perhaps lacking. Additionally, when intrinsic motivation in early childhood educators is activated, researchers saw them become passionate, articulate, and empowered as they speak of their profession. Nurturing this intrinsic motivation and fostering opportunities that encourage them to use their voice in this way, and creating occasions where they can take back their power

and passion of what they love most: being an early childhood educator might help work toward building this capacity within the early childhood sector. Underlying the extrinsic motivation and need for approval, there are remnants of the oppressed (Freire, 1921) where these (mostly) women feel that they are being told what to do, and that their role is inferior in some way. In addition, how do we get beyond the deeply engrained notions of care versus education when some of these educators might not buy into this notion themselves? This indicates that there is also an opportunity to create opportunities and mechanisms where early childhood educators can explore these notions of power, and talk about their role as professionals.

### **Strengthening Professionalism and Reducing Schoolification**

Pedagogical documentation was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by the educators of the infant-toddler centers and preschools of the municipality of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy and has spread world-wide (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). It supports educators in both including child development in their view but also looking beyond development to capture broader aspects of experience for reflection. Pedagogical documentation opens us up to relations and meanings that we have not thought to look for: this expansion of what we might learn to know and interpret is its gift to us (Wein, 2013, p. 1).

Pedagogical documentation started out as a way to view the child, in a holistic way. It was a way to see progress and growth and examine possibilities for the child in his/her learning, growth, and development. It appears in the research (Carr, 2011) that pedagogical documentation was intended to provide a holistic assessment of the child and their strengths. As educators reclaim their professional voices, and strengthen their theoretical knowledge of the practical applications of their profession, they will find this helpful to be able to better communicate the

purpose and long term goals of early learning and care to others (other educators, families, etc). When early childhood educators use their voices and their specialized bank of knowledge and skills to articulate developmentally appropriate practice and reflective pedagogy, they strengthen their position of power. This would work to help them push up; instead of feeling the push down of developmentally inappropriate expectations and practice.

### **Support for Directors**

One of the single most important predictors of educational institutions is the strength of its leader(s) (Day & Sammons, 2013); in particular the strength of its pedagogical leadership (Andrews, 2009; Curtis, Lebo, Cividances, & Carter, 2012; Coughlin & Baird, 2014; Spillane, 2005; Wenger, 1998). With all of the system change that has occurred, directors of early learning and childcare centres are left as the primary mentor of their staff on a daily basis. Support for directors is required, and was articulated as a key piece of moving forward with the Prince Edward Island Preschool Excellence Initiative; and the opportunity is ripe in 2016. They have tools and are competent to be effective leaders in the early childhood field. Expert professional development in areas of pedagogical coaching, and other areas that they express a need for further learning and development would only strengthen the support directors are able to provide. Although this research supports a small sample of early childhood educators and directors in PEI, it was clear that some directors are thirsting for additional knowledge to help them support the early childhood educators who serve the children in their centres; but also for personal and professional satisfaction and confidence to become the leaders of the early childhood system of tomorrow.

## **Educational Significance and Recommendations**

In the short term, the findings from this project help to inform the design of professional learning opportunities for these educators who have 10+ years of experience. In the long term, the findings from this project will add to the body of research that has been funded by the ECDA and contribute to the knowledge surrounding professionalism of early childhood educators in Prince Edward Island and Canada. Several recommendations have emerged based on the findings and will be detailed below. Recommendations include:

1. The establishment of a longer term **community of practice** through the ECDA as a professional learning opportunity to address emerging interests and needs of its members that supports critical reflection, and collaborative learning (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; McGregor, Hooker, Wise, & Devlin, 2010; Powell, Diamond, & Cockburn, 2013; Teague & Anafra, 2012; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002);
2. A workplace **recognition strategy** be developed to address the needs of the sector: workplace wellness programming, recognition programs, resiliency training to support ECE's' self-care, emotional intelligence and well-being, and stress management associated with change; and
3. An enhanced, re-focused, **campaign** about what play based learning is about and the role that early childhood professionals play in creating and supporting this love for learning. This would enhance the messages from the Start with Play campaign and support the use of language/ articulation that supports professionalism; early childhood educators who are able to articulate why only they can do what they do will work toward building their confidence; further professionalizing the practice (Feeney, 2012; Goffin, 2013) and building dialogue about what excellent early learning and care is all about.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Matrix

#### Description:

- Four key questions (ideally four)
- Flipchart in four corners of the room
- Groups of four
- Each person is assigned a number 1-4; and thus “owns one of the questions”
- Each participant has a template with their number, the question, and space for results of three interviews in their group
- There are six rounds of one-on-one interviews:
  - Sequence: (1-2, 3-4) (2-3, 4-1) (2-4, 3-1) (3-2, 1-4) (4-2, 1-3) (2-1, 4-3) (put these on slides at front and time people – announce each switch)
  - Timing: each sequence should last/ timed 2-3 minutes
- The second component is the editing stage: one’s go to flip chart #1 and compare notes, two’s go to flipchart #2, and so on. Record answers from your templates. 10 minutes
- In the third component, the whole group visits each corner and comments on what they can and can’t live with. Consensus is built on the answers.20 minutes. (5 minutes each flipchart)
- Then, open discussion.

#### Four Key Questions:

1. Tell me about your job when you first entered the field.
  - Prompt: What duties and responsibilities were you responsible for?
2. What is your job like now as an ECE? Has it changed over the years?
  - Prompt: What do you want to reclaim or bring back as a practice that you think is essential to ECE’s.
3. Let’s talk about the recent policy shifts over the last decade in PEI. Kindergarten has moved to the public school system; there’s been the PEIPEI (and subsequent Early Learning Framework). How have you experienced this shift?
  - Prompt: What were some challenges successes? What has it been like? What have you observed?
4. What makes you passionate about your job?
  - Why do you do what you do/ continue to do what you do?

## **Appendix B**

### **In-depth Interview Questions**

*\*depending if person participated in original Workshop: if not, they will be asked the same four original questions, plus these.*

#### **Sample Guiding Protocol**

##### **The “then”**

1. What were you most excited about when you first began teaching?
2. What were some of the favourite activities and planning you did?
3. What do you miss?
4. What are the ‘dirty words’ of daycare? (example: circle time, etc).

##### **The “now” – SWOT analysis**

5. What do you understand to be the strengths of the 21<sup>st</sup> century early learning movement?
6. What do you think are the weaknesses?
7. What are some opportunities for you in your practice now?
8. What threatens these opportunities?

##### **General**

9. What does professionalism mean to you as an ECE? (this could also be first question).

## Appendix C



550 University Avenue  
Charlottetown  
Prince Edward Island  
Canada C1A 4P3

**To:** Alaina Roach O'Keefe  
Education

**Protocol Number:** REB Ref # 6006441

**Title:** What Happened to Everything I learned in College? Examining experienced early childhood educator's ideas about professionalism in PEI

**Date Approved:** October 29 2015  
**End Date:** October 28 2016

The above mentioned research proposal has been reviewed and approved by the UPEI Research Ethics Board. Please be advised that the Research Ethics Board currently operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2014) and applicable laws and regulations.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the Ethics Renewal form is forwarded to Research Services prior to the renewal date. The information provided in this form must be current to the time of submission and submitted to Research Services not less than 30 days prior to the anniversary of your approval date. The Ethics Renewal form can be downloaded from the Research Services website (<http://www.upei.ca/research/forms>).

Any proposed changes to the study must also be submitted on the same form to the UPEI Research Ethics Board for approval.

The Research Ethics Board advises that IF YOU DO NOT return the completed Ethics Renewal form prior to the date of renewal:

- Your ethics approval will lapse
- You will be required to stop research activity immediately
- You will not be permitted to restart the study until you reapply for and receive approval to undertake the study again.

*Lapse in ethics approval may result in interruption or termination of funding.*

Notwithstanding the approval of the REB, the primary responsibility for the ethical conduct of the investigation remains with you.

Sincerely,

James E. Moran, Ph.D.  
Chair, UPEI Research Ethics Board